

HOW SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS DISCUSS POWER DURING A COMMUNITY
SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Jessica F. Benton: HOW SCHOOL COMMUNITY MEMBERS DISCUSS POWER DURING
A COMMUNITY SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE STUDY

(Under the direction of Brian C. Gibbs)

School communities have been shut out of many of the more critical decision-making processes impacting local public schools. Decisions are mostly made as top-down actions from federal mandates, general assemblies, state departments, districts, and school level administration teams, isolating the school communities they are tasked to serve. Foucault proposed that power generally reflects the wants and needs of those in relationship with power (Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1995). Having relationships with one's power allows not just for power to impact the individual, but also for the individual to impact the reality power co-creates. To better understand the ways members of the school community can access their relationships to power and the importance of this component, I used a Foucauldian-inspired notion of power to guide my analysis. Using an updated public school model that is technically over a century old, some schools are using their relationships to shift power structures and flows through a *community school* model (Rogers, 1998). Currently, in a small urban district in North Carolina, this initiative is well underway. The purpose of this study is to examine how school community members talk about power, who school community members identify as having power, and shifts in power happening at their community school. I used a qualitative intrinsic case study methodology to

explore these three research questions. Interviews and elicitation devices were my primary data sources, so I used a critical discourse analysis as my method to analyze these interviews. Findings showed that some school community members were beginning to understand their power through decision making. To continue this momentum, I recommend that community schools continue the discourse, make better distinctions between students and their data, and create parent liaison positions. In addition, community schools should look at ways to better engage parents, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, instructional assistants, and other classified staff to draw upon their expertise and knowledge. Finally, I urge districts and governance groups to consider the sustainability of their community schools and the actions they can take to ensure these schools have the time, funding, and power to make lasting, measurable changes.

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Before I talk about my study of community schools, I think it is important that readers understand that I have been connected to this study for quite some time. Prior to working on my PhD, my organizing efforts led to me taking part in an ongoing effort to start a community school in North Carolina that actually began while I was still teaching in the classroom. I define *organizing* as a set of practices that bring people together under a common cause to advocate for themselves. It is about how people raise expectations for how they are treated by the institutions that employ, educate, treat, and serve them (McAlevey & Ostertag, 2012). It is also important to note that organizing involves a definitive strategic plan that helps those fighting for the cause to plan direct actions and campaigns that will raise awareness and attract public support.

Organizing was an integral part of the journey that led to this study, and I want to outline how I got to this point in my career in education in hopes that readers will better understand the history and context of my efforts. These experiences have provided the foundation for my thinking about schools, the purposes I believe they should serve, and the ways I think meaningful changes can be made in schools. There are many reasons as to why I say and think the ways I do about schools and the importance of a community school movement. For the purposes of clarity, I have provided short vignettes throughout the first chapter that detail my history with schools and the community schools efforts in North Carolina in particular.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I started my career in education at the end of November 2004 at an elementary school in North Carolina. I worked as a teaching assistant for a special education classroom for two years while I earned my Masters of Education at a local university. It was a transitional time for education, especially following the implementation of No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, legislation. During the course of my time in public school classrooms, I watched as schools began to change how they measured success and what they expected from their students, teachers, and schools in general. It was a gradual change at first, but what started out looking like an earnest attempt at making good schools for all students' success, changed across the next two decades into something that I thought had nothing to do with forwarding students' needs.

In 2004, teachers were gathering their credentials to prove they were highly qualified, and students were beginning to take end of grade tests to measure their mastery of the curriculum. Although those changes were inconvenient adjustments at the time, most schools were still being given some autonomy over what was happening in the building overall. However, by 2016, when I eventually left the classroom, schools were being ranked based on test scores, private companies were creating the algorithms that set those rankings, lower performing schools were receiving mandates from districts and states that controlled everything that was taught and learned, and states were using policy templates to create legislation that continually cut funds to public schools and siphoned those monies off to private businesses. Public schools were literally under attack. As alarmist as this may sound, it was my lived reality for 12 years. And while this is not an exhaustive list of all that transpired, suffice it to say it was

a tough time. One can only be told they are failing so many times before they start to believe that is true.

As trite as it sounds, it always felt like there was never enough time in the day to meet all of my students' needs. NCLB ushered in a time where schools began adding more and more tasks to my list of daily duties, all in the name of accountability. What was frustrating at first, slowly began to wear down my enthusiasm for teaching. No matter what I did, how hard I tried, or how long I stayed at school and planned; it was just never enough. I got sick and tired of coming home every day feeling like I failed my students. What's more, a resounding narrative that public schools were failing and needed to be better managed using private business models was gaining momentum. The public support I had once felt as a teacher began to degrade, and it felt like teachers and public schools were being constantly criticized from just about every angle. As mandates continued, I felt powerless and unable to make the changes I thought my students needed.

As my own experience showed, school communities have been shut out of many of the more critical decision-making processes impacting local public schools. Decisions are mostly made as top-down actions from federal mandates, general assemblies, state departments, districts, and school level administration teams, isolating the school communities they are tasked to serve. School staff such as teachers, instructional assistants, cafeteria workers, school social workers, and others are included less and less often in the decision-making processes that determine what their work in schools looks like. Both curriculum and pedagogy, what is being taught and how it is being taught, are decided in spaces outside of the schools implementing them. Parents and families that comprise the school community itself are included even less often. This has increasingly become the case in this era of standards and accountability, as

federal, state, and district level decision makers play larger roles in how public schools are run and managed. These types of decisions and mandates tend to be more palatable to school communities when there is the appearance of widespread popular support—one that is associated with *grassroots* movements that come from “community-based organizations and movements representing broad-based support” (Lubienski, Brewer, & La Londe, 2016, p. 65). However, there has been some push back with this terminology, especially in policy circles, and those groups at the top that do not come from organically formed networks have been labeled *grass-tops*. Grass-tops leaders can be elected officials or positions promoted from within district, state, or federal level institutions, that may or may not be wholly representative of the communities they serve (Lubienski, Brewer, & La Londe, 2016). While that does not necessarily mean that they do not have the best interests of these communities in mind, these grass-tops leaders do generally have more access to avenues that get their needs and wants voiced in ways that are heard due to their positions of power (Trujillo et al., 2014). For the purposes of clarity, when I refer to grass-tops positions, I mean superintendents, district level workers, elected officials, and the like. When I refer to school communities, I mean parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community partners; or those that more closely mirror grassroots positions. When I refer to this era of standards and accountability, I am referring to a historical moment following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* that started in the early 1980s and runs into the present day.

Proponents of standards and accountability have traditionally wanted to see a back-to-basics curriculum provided to all regardless of locality. They want to increase control over instruction, reduce teacher autonomy, create national educational standards, and use privately created testing measures as a means for accountability (Labaree, 2012; Apple, 2004). Teacher and instructional autonomy are based on the notion that pedagogical and curricular decisions are

best made by the training, practice, and learned expertise of professional teachers and parents. However, proponents of standards and accountability tend to downplay this expertise. They believe that students from across the nation need to be learning the same types of content along the same timelines in order for testing measures to be reliable and regional student data comparable. This was the era in which I lived and worked in schools.

Many times, these grass-tops leaders use their power to allot funding to schools, rank schools publicly, and even dictate what types of reading, writing, and math programs will be used for instruction. Meanwhile, school communities and the staff, community partners, and families working and learning in schools, are isolated from their power to make impactful changes in public schools. The problem is no amount of professional development or trendy curriculum can equal the collective wisdom, or *funds of knowledge*, a school community brings to the decision-making table. Funds of knowledge refer to the competencies and knowledge people in school communities have gathered through their unique life experiences that are needed in schools' decision-making bodies (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005). Strengthening their relationships to power has the potential of innovating in ways not yet seen. In addition to the potentials school communities offer towards overall school improvement, research shows that parent and community involvement have also been known to improve student outcomes across all racial backgrounds (Galindo, Sanders & Abel, 2017; NEPC, 2017). It is unreasonable to continue to publicly criticize schools and their communities without also holding grass-tops leaders accountable as well. Sharing power between grass-tops and school communities opens up new potentials for public schools and has the potential to diminish some of the isolation school communities currently feel from their local public schools. Refusal to do so, on the other hand,

could perpetuate a power imbalance that keeps public schools from reflectively serving the communities they were created to serve (Trujillo et al., 2014).

Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

Eventually I started organizing with a group of teachers from across the state that I met through the local teacher union. I worked on school board campaigns, knocked on doors, and made hundreds of phone calls. I rallied, marched, and strategized in colleagues' dining rooms. I learned about structural racism and how it impacted my students. I talked to my peers about state level educational policies that were not good for students and their families, and urged teachers to speak out. I spoke at press conferences, school board meetings, and county commission meetings. Although each event called for various actions and demands, overall, it was about creating schools that I felt students deserved. I wanted to see schools that were more centered on creating thoughtful, capable citizens than good test takers and obedient workers.

Organizing with other teachers was both a means of avoiding feelings of powerlessness and a way to make changes I truly believed possible. One of the things my compatriots and I would say to one another was that “organizing works”. While that would buoy my spirits during tough campaigns, I never truly understood why that was the case. It worked, but why exactly? It was not until I started reading Foucault in graduate school that something clicked for me. It worked because it put people in touch with their power! It worked because it gave people an opportunity to make their wants and needs known through an organized strategy.

Foucault proposed that power generally reflects the wants and needs of those in relationship with power. Having relationships with one's power allows not just for power to impact the individual, but also for the individual to impact the reality power co-creates. It is a mutually constructive relationship (Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1995). Having a relationship with

power means that one is engaging with others in decision-making spaces, thereby making their wants, needs, and intentions known in that space. It means that they are represented in decisions that impact them. If the majority of those relating to their power are currently in top-down, grass-tops positions, that could mean that it is their wants and needs that primarily manifest in public schools. Luckily, theoretically speaking this does not necessarily have to be the case. Foucault's ways of describing power shed light on the possibilities of changing the directions in which power flows, who is able to impact those directional flows, and instructing how the power itself behaves. In *Power/Knowledge* (1980) he says the following:

But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I'm thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives (p. 39).

Power is everywhere and is a part of everything one does and thinks. Foucault also notes that because of this relationship people have to power, it shapes and is shaped by those in relation to it. As one begins to see their relationships with power, they can in turn shape that power through the relation to further their wants and needs.

It is important to understand that thinking of power in these terms is not a truly Foucauldian way of looking at power per se. It is more of a "Foucauldian-inspired" way of looking at power, and for the purposes of this paper, it will be the way I am defining and interpreting power and the way it behaves. Applying these Foucauldian-inspired notions of power to school communities could mean that power will be better shaped by all of those represented in the school community once they become aware of their relationship to the power structure itself. Once school community members realize their potential to shape power and are

given opportunities to participate in leadership positions, it is possible that the results will better reflect and represent the wants and needs of the school community members participating in this power wielding process. While it is not enough to just perceive one's power to make a change, once one sees how they are related to their power, taking purposeful actions that serve that relationship stand to make a shift in who power serves and how it behaves. This is why "organizing works". Community schools could possibly be ideal spaces where community members begin to realize and exercise their power. They could be places where school community members realize their power and exercise their right to participate in decision-making spaces, affording them the ability to use it, move it, and maneuver it for their purposes.

Power is shaped by these relations as the forces bump into one another to either change them, make them stronger for one force, or reverse the direction in which the power flows (Foucault, 1990). Because power has the capability of flowing seamlessly from one relation to another, it can also be suspended, blocked, or held by certain relations depending on how it is wielded or who is struggling for it. When parents and teachers follow school mandates without advocating for themselves and their students, then power can get blocked or held by grass-tops leaders. When those on the ground, inside the school community, fight for what they believe their community needs are, there is the potential to open up systems for power to flow from top to bottom, left to right, or in any direction where people are relating and using their power. However, for any of this to take place, relationships and representation are key. When schools are isolated from their communities, school community members are unable to influence key school wide decisions. There is no relation to their power because they are not represented in these spaces, and power will tend to stay where it has been: at the top.

Problem Statement

The problem was the more I learned about fighting for public education, the more I saw all of the inequities my students' families faced: racism, (non)liveable wages, inadequate healthcare, trauma, language barriers, educational policies that cut funding, lack of access to housing, and the like. The list went on and on. It was overwhelming. I began to see lots and lots of cracks in a system that had been hidden from me somehow, and what seemed like a much simpler fix in the beginning of my career, grew into a massive institutional breakdown that called for major student-centered reform.

As a way to cope with all of the enormous tasks with which schools were saddled, I started daydreaming about opening my own school. Working as a special education teacher in the time I did, it did not take long before I started thinking up different scenarios. Initially I envisioned an elementary residential school for students with learning disabilities and emotional challenges where students lived and worked for 10 months out of the year. There would be a garden that the teachers and students tended together and used for food. Meal times would be sacred where faculty, staff, and students cooked, ate, and cleaned together. I also toyed with the notion of curriculum. One iteration put science in the center of everything. I imagined students learning reading, writing, and math through their science instruction. Another iteration was project based where students learned the basics by researching topics, writing about what they found, and presenting that information in various ways. Yet another was centered on solving local community problems as a means for learning the three Rs.

Although I was not sure exactly what an ideal school would look like, the notion of starting my own school never totally faded. Through all of the trials I faced as an educator, it was always there. It felt a bit naive to think that starting a school could address the myriad of

issues my students faced daily, but something about it stuck. It nagged at me. I knew it had to be public. I knew it had to offer teachers and parents more autonomy and leadership opportunities. And I knew it had to address as many of the issues students faced outside of the school building as it could.

Numerical realities.

Currently, power seems to be mostly serving those in grass-tops positions creating an imbalance or blockage of power. One reason this is so unsettling is how closely along the lines of race and class those relationships to power run. Public school populations are demographically changing at a hastened pace in comparison to those in grass-tops leadership roles. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), or NCES, enrollment for White students decreased from 61 to 49 percent between 2000 and 2015, and Black student enrollment also decreased from 17 to 15 percent. However, enrollment for Latino students increased from 16 to 26 percent. As the enrollment rates of Black and Brown students in public schools continues to shift, the proportion of Whites in powerful, decision-making positions is slow to change. The number of Black and Brown school superintendents has been on the rise, but they still only made up 5.1 percent of the total population of superintendents according to a survey done in 2000 by the School Superintendents Association, or AASA (Rand, 2003). While this is just one example of underrepresentation of Black and Brown school leaders, it puts into perspective how few of those in grass-tops positions are representative of who is learning in public schools.

This underrepresentation puts Black and Brown students at risk of falling victim, as some of their family members did before them, to the negative impacts of *structural racism* and *white supremacy* (Trujillo et al., 2014). Friedman (1969) defined structural racism as a “pattern of action in which one or more of the institutions of society has the power to throw on more

burdens and give less benefits to the members of one race than another on an on-going basis” (p. 20). Over time, this inhibits Black and Brown people from being able to live financially, politically, psychologically, and socially fulfilled lives (Golash-Baza, 2016). According to Mills (1997) “white supremacy is a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights, and duties” (p. 3). Both structural racism and white supremacy work together to create and perpetuate certain hegemonic, or artificially naturalized, practices that continue to over-benefit Whites both purposefully and inadvertently so much so that they become the unquestioned status quo (Golash-Baza, 2016). As related entities living together in a community, all people have a relationship to their power and the ability to impact the power structures in their communities through that relationship. All students are hurt by structural racism and white supremacy, and everyone in a society stands to gain when school communities engage all of the voices from those communities. Using the school community’s relationships to power is one way schools can actively work to address how they participate in or resist structural racism, white supremacy, and a hegemony that does not serve all people equally.

Lack of instructional autonomy.

This removed form of top-down decision-making also impacts pedagogical practices and curriculum. According to Shulman (1987), pedagogy is “an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8). Curriculum is the breakdown of a course of study into smaller components that is based upon the knowledge and values of those that create it (Kliebard, 2004). When all power is being wielded from the top-down, the very organization, representation, adaptation, and presentation aspects of instruction are taken out of

the hands of those working in schools and the families that make up the school community. What is taught and how it is paced is decided by far removed leaders that may or may not have lived experience inside the classroom. Instead of relying on the experience and knowledge of the school community itself or on the local cultures that inform the school community, grass-tops leaders seek to standardize pedagogy and curriculum across districts, states, and the nation as a whole. The problem with this is that not every school community is the same, something many would argue is for the best. Because of these contextually based differences, some classes might need longer amounts of time with decoding or more practice with multiplication than the presentation and pacing guides handed to schools allow. With standardized tests looming at the end of the year, schools begin to focus on exposing students to all of the covered test material rather than ensuring students reach mastery. Building off of the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, education researchers such as Paris and Alim (2014) call for a more culturally sustaining curriculum. A curriculum that “seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change” (p. 85). While institutions of higher education and education research have been extolling the benefits of and need for culturally sustaining curriculum for over two decades, public schools’ hands are tied when mandates dictate pedagogy and curriculum that reflect the ideologies of the grass-tops. Instead of turning to the funds of knowledge of school communities for guidance, these leaders continue to pay private companies to write curriculum and create the tests used to measure pedagogical effectiveness, taking overall instructional autonomy out of the hands of local school communities and those trained in educational practice, and handing it over to privately run businesses.

Socially efficient versus human centered.

When this happens, grass-tops ideologies begin to impact the aims and purposes of public schools. In the case of schools, their focus has vacillated between being *socially efficient* and *human centered*. Figure 1 shows this swing. What I call the socially efficient model has traditionally focused on serving business and market interests with the aim of turning students into reliable, basically educated workers; while the human centered model puts the student and school community at the front and center, and asks schools to seek out learning experiences for themselves that are focused on local assets and needs (Kliebard, 2004; Labaree, 2012). While one could argue that a balance can be struck between social efficiency and human need, I would argue that this lack of balance between the two purposes of public schools is due in part to the lack of balance of those wielding power. When one group is overly represented, such as the grass-tops leaders currently are, they begin to have more influence on the purposes schools serve as well as how the power works for all groups. With grass-tops leaders looking to private entities to provide curriculum, testing instruments, school models, and the like; market and business interests are inserted into the public school system changing how and why public schools function as they do. Meanwhile those working and learning in schools frequently tout the need to foster the physical, social, emotional, and academic needs of their students. While they do want students to be able to compete in the American workforce, they see this purpose as a part of students' human needs rather than the whole. Due to power imbalances this disparity in purpose has made it extremely difficult to understand if schools are doing what they propose to do, not to mention left schools in an almost constant state of reform and flux. Any human centered institution needs to be grounded in a theory and purpose before it can even begin to consider how

the work needs to be organized, planned, and carried out. This near constant shifting of purpose makes it difficult for schools to center their efforts. It takes inordinate amounts of time for the smaller components that do the work of schooling to align to one purpose before it has once again begun to shift to the other extreme. This not only keeps schools in a perpetual state of change, but it also never gives any one initiative the time needed to be disseminated, learned, and mastered by those working and teaching in schools. This constant shift also takes its toll on those who carry out the work of schools, as one is never quite sure how long the newest initiative will last before everything is once again redone. In other words, it breeds a lack of investment on the part of just about anyone associated with schools. This constant state of fluctuation also inhibits schools from ever truly developing into a state of realization, as they are always in some stage of development. I believe it is unrealistic to think that schools will eventually be centered on either social efficiency or human need given the history of this vacillation. Because of American social, economic, and political systems, schools have and will serve both human and business interests to some measure at any given moment according to that moment. However, I do think that these purposes could be balanced out in terms of what is needed most at that moment in American society when all of a school's community is being represented in the school's decision-making processes. This imbalance could be readily addressed if power and decision-making were being shared with the school communities living and breathing inside public schools.

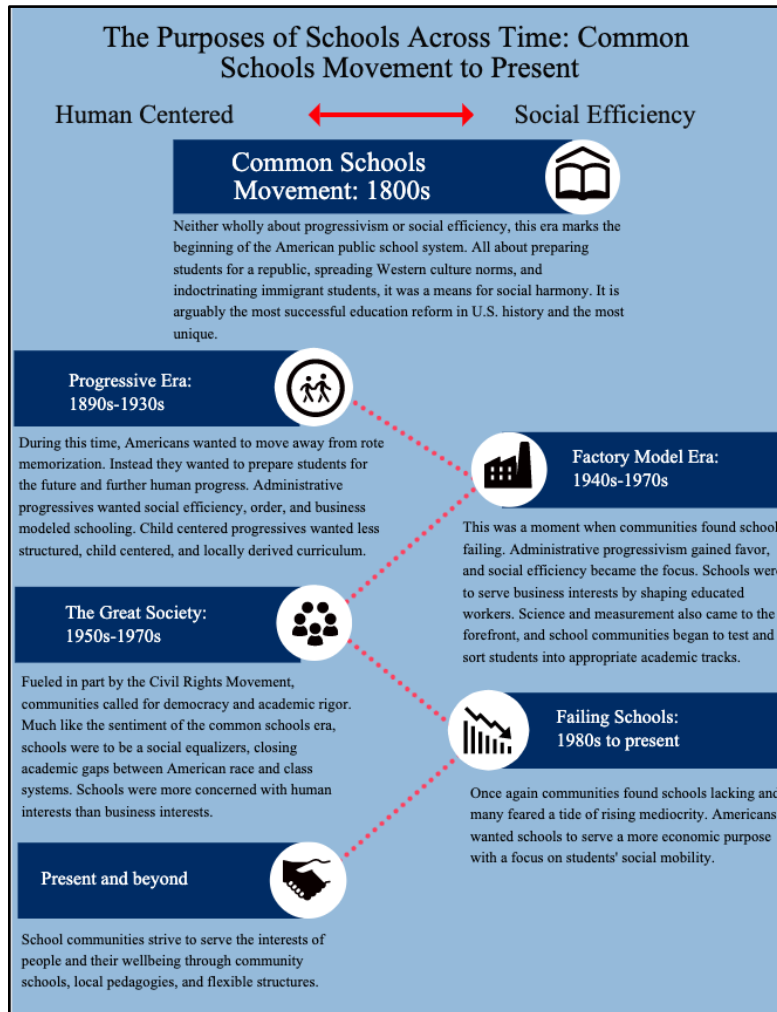


Figure 1. Human-centered and socially efficient eras in American public schools.

Statement of Purpose

Around 2015, I learned about community schools at a union reform network convention. The ways that the presenters described the community input and connections seemed like an answer to a question that had been bugging me for quite some time. How were schools really going to do everything that students needed in order to learn? It was a major turning point for me to learn that there were schools that not only asked families to be engaged, they encouraged their leadership and input in a democratic way. I wanted to see community schools become a reality in North Carolina for my own students and their families. I wanted to see teachers and

the families they served working together to meet all of the needs of students. The more I learned about them, the more I believed that they could be the perfect vehicle for relating people to their power in lasting ways.

I would talk to anyone about my ideas that would listen, but it was hard to garner support. At the time, teachers were fighting for desperately needed funding for their struggling students and their measly salaries. Starting a school seemed impossible. The thought of innovating, experimenting, and taking major risks as a means to stop the bleeding just seemed inappropriate at that time. Public schools were having a very difficult time just making ends meet with the funding cuts they had experienced in my state. Teachers were leaving by the droves, and all things education felt a bit helpless. Eventually, beaten and discouraged, I finally left my beloved classroom and applied for graduate school. Somehow, I knew there was a way to make this whole community school dream a reality, I just did not know what it was yet. I was accepted into the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to earn my PhD and entered in the fall of 2016 looking for a way to start a community school.

Using an updated public school model that is technically over a century old, some schools are using their relationships to shift power structures and flows through a *community school* model. Rogers (1998) defines them as “...a loose set of beliefs and practices propelled by educators and citizens attempting to create a counterweight to the alienating, isolating, and disempowering forces of modern, mass schooling” (p. 11). Community schools are public schools that create partnerships between the public school and the resources in that community. Using an integrative approach, they work to improve academics, health outcomes, community development, leadership, and overall school community engagement (CCS, 2020). They share leadership with the surrounding school community, including parents, local businesses, health

departments, nonprofits, and other natural allies in the planning and decision-making process (NEPC, 2017). They provide wrap around services and after school programs. They create strategic plans based on needs and assets determined by the school community itself. They align themselves with positive discipline practices and actively work to disrupt the school to prison pipeline. They promote curricular innovation that is culturally sustaining and guided by teacher expertise. They cultivate leadership in ways that pull from all of the funds of knowledge within the school, and they build a shared commitment to the entire school community. They make the argument that charter schools are not the only schools being innovative, and that the tools and partners public schools need to ensure schools are reaching all of our students equitably can be found right inside school communities. Community schools allow for localization and the ability for school communities to build schools that serve and represent the communities themselves and repair the long standing disconnects that many school communities face (NEPC, 2017). These schools offer both common sense and cutting-edge practices to cultivate curriculum, teaching practice, social justice, and local leadership to boost achievement and offer school communities a chance to repair and renew (CCS, 2020).

Although there are many different ways to define and interpret what a community school is and does, the community schools in this study are modeled after the National Education Association, or NEA, model that incorporates *six pillars* that address the main areas of focus based on what the research says are current issues for public schools. These six pillars are: high quality teaching, culturally sustaining curriculum, positive behavior practices, inclusive leadership, parent and community engagement, and wrap around services. These six pillars are set into motion using *four mechanisms* that include a *community school organizer*, an asset and needs assessment, a strategic plan, and community partnerships (NEA, 2018; CPD, 2016). The

community school organizer acts as the bridge between the community and school, and will be more fully discussed in the second chapter. Using these six pillars and four mechanisms, community schools offer school communities a chance to see and connect with their power through participation in a school wide asset and needs assessment, school leadership, and *goal teams*. As a part of their asset and needs assessment process, community schools create teams of school community members that center in on three to four areas of need and create plans of action as to how to address those needs. For the purposes of this paper, these teams will be referred to as goal teams (NEA, 2018). This definition of community schools may not fit the needs for all current and future sites. However, these pillars and mechanisms are a starting point and a central focus for understanding the community schools in this study.

Presently there are several successful community schools across the country that have been able to survive and thrive. According to a report by the Center for Popular Democracy, or CPD, (2016), community schools in Cincinnati were able to reduce the achievement gap between White students and Black and Brown students, increase their graduation rate, and send more students than ever to college. Reagan High, a community school in Austin, TX that was on the brink of school closure, has seen similar success. In Tennessee, counties using a community school model have seen major gains in math proficiency scores. While these are just a few examples of successes community schools claim, they show the potential for gain when school communities build their relationship to power and are an active part of decision-making processes at their public school.

Research Questions

During my second year in grad school, I received an invitation to join a team of people from North Carolina to attend a training on community schools. One of the leaders I had

organized with in the past had been asked to attend and he knew I was interested in learning more as well. In May of 2017, two teachers, two administrators, the president of the local NCAE affiliate, and I traveled to Milwaukee, WI to learn about how community schools worked. There we met with a national network of community school advocates that helped us develop a plan to start a community school in North Carolina.

Upon our return, I helped gather and lead a monthly meeting of people to begin thinking about how to launch a community school in the area. After hiring an organizer and developing a strategy, the team started having conversations with school board members, county commissioners, and a newly appointed superintendent. By the spring of 2018, the team and I had raised enough funding and support to pilot four community schools and hire a community school organizer to help start the process at each of the schools. Over the following school year each of the schools participated in an asset and needs assessment. They were tasked with asking students, school workers, and parents about what they thought worked at their school, what they thought needed to change, and how they proposed those changes be carried out. Lots of data was collected through one-on-one conversations, surveys, and focus groups and analyzed to determine what were each of the school's biggest needs and greatest resources. Throughout this process, I was able to work with the community school organizers to analyze and interpret their findings.

Currently, in a small urban district in North Carolina, this initiative to pilot two remaining elementary community schools is well underway. Having just completed their school wide asset and needs assessment the school year prior, they are in the beginnings of building decision-making and goal teams that include school community members that have oftentimes been excluded. Using what they have learned from a yearlong listening project, they are working to

create opportunities for school communities to access, relate to, and build their power. The purpose of this study is to examine who community members identify as having power, how they talk about their relationship to power, and if they see shifts in power happening at their local community school. I looked for these phenomena in the two pilot schools through the ways they talked about changes and happenings that were occurring as the community implemented a community school model. Shifts in power from grass-tops to the school community are indicative of a more inclusive model of school decision-making that is focused on needs determined by the school community itself as opposed to grass-tops, socially efficient centered forces. My three research questions are: 1) how do school community members talk about power; 2) how do school community members talk about who has power; and 3) how do school community members talk about shifts in power at two community schools in a small urban district in North Carolina as they implement a community school model?

Justification of the Study

These research questions are crucial for understanding the ways that community schools shift power from grass-tops entities to school community members. It helps uncover how they redistribute power across school communities, how members of those communities articulate these changes or lack thereof, and how school communities may or may not establish relationships with their power. These questions point out the ways community schools address the issues of underrepresentation, structural racism, and white supremacy. These questions give researchers opportunities to better understand all of these phenomena by directly asking them of the very school community members that have experienced this implementation process directly. What's more, they could also shed light on how community schools may or may not address some larger themes in this particular historical moment in educational history.

Standards and accountability.

For at least two decades, the standards and accountability movement has shaped the ways schools work. It has been an era of increased state and federal involvement. It has asked schools to hire only those highly qualified, and used standardized testing measures to determine if students are proficient and showing growth in certain academic areas. It has been an era of choice where families have been given chances to leave their local schools for private and charter schools (Labaree, 2012). As more and more White families choose to send their children to these private and charter schools, the face of public schools has begun to change. Black and Brown students now make up the majority of who is attending public schools. While having these students in public schools is not a negative development in and of itself, it puts these populations in a system that is more highly regulated by governance structures that are typically not racially representative of those students. This means that Black and Brown students are going to schools with less independence and autonomy where curriculum and pedagogy are being dictated to them. This era has also been a time of heightened emphasis on the values of a socially efficient system where all public school students are being groomed to be a rule-following, line-walking, timeclock-guided workforce that may or may not be given opportunities to explore their academic strengths and build their individual intelligences.

Despite all of the claims this era has made about making meaningful change, the results have been lackluster. Almost 20 years after the signing of No Child Left Behind, it is becoming abundantly clear that standards, accountability, and choice have done relatively little to effectively improve students' academic proficiency and overall outcomes, let alone change how schools function, much like that of the many eras and trends that have gone before them (Labaree, 2012). Achievement gaps continue to exist; schools still track students by race, ability

level, and socioeconomic standing; and all of those innovative charters are doing much of the same teaching as found in traditional public schools. It is important to try to push back against the current standards and accountability moment and the ways it limits what students do, learn, and ultimately become. The work of schools needs to be that of building competent people and not efficient workers.

Community schools.

Community schools have the potential to change these trends and give Black and Brown communities just representation and more say about what is being taught and learned in their local schools. It gives them chances to actively participate in the decision-making processes, build their leadership skills, and make relationships with their power. Community schools might also shed some light on what could be a huge shift in thinking about what schools are supposed to do for students and society at large. If the purposes of schools truly are shifting to a more human centered focus, community schools could be an indication of this shift, a product of this shift, or a bit of both. This particular study of community schools is important for this time because it could help educators and researchers understand this shifting phenomenon.

If this increase in community schools is indicative of a larger shift happening in American school systems from socially efficient to human centered, educators and researchers need to better understand why that is. While this shift is not a particularly novel change, it is an indication that a new era is on the rise. An ideological window could be opening up that has the possibility of ushering in a more human centered way of schooling. Knowing and understanding that this shift is on the horizon could allow for more human centered reform movements or make the purposes for schooling more appealing for this moment in public school history.

Community schools could also be a product of this shift. Currently, these models are on the rise nationwide, something that will be more fully explained in the literature review. Many are already seeing results because of the ways they allow schools to localize and draw on the funds of knowledge of the school community (Galindo, Sanders, & Abel, 2017). Sometimes the result of union intervention, community schools are looking to better schools in ways that continue this trend of serving human needs over socially efficient needs. This study could potentially add to the body of knowledge as to whether or not community schools have what it takes to make a shift in the purposes of schooling. Looking at how the school community at each of the two community schools talks about and discusses shifts in power could be an indication that indeed there is an ideological shift towards more human centered schooling. It could also help educators and researchers understand what the possibilities are for community schools, even as they enter into the beginnings of an implementation process.

This moment.

Finally, this study is important for this moment because of where these schools are in their implementation process. Both of these schools are still in the beginning stages of this movement. They have completed their asset and needs assessments, created goal teams, and are in the initial stages of working to meet their school's needs, all of which will be described in more detail in chapter three. This is but one stage in the entire process of becoming a community school, and it is temporary. Soon, the community schools will be moving into more direct work with the three to four goals areas they have set for themselves. This moment needs to be studied and captured due to its temporal nature. Further, should this develop into a possible longitudinal study about the community school implementation process in the future, each stage needs to be researched in order to better understand what happens in these settings across time. Before too

long this moment will have passed, and school community members may or may not have a reliable memory of its inherent impacts and results.

Overview of Methodology

In order to better understand all that I have addressed above, I used an *intrinsic case study* methodology that centered my study on these two rather unique community school environments. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe an intrinsic case study as one that focuses solely on the case because of how unusual that case is. As with the two schools chosen for this study, they are in the process of implementing a school model that is very distinct compared to the other elementary schools in the district. Case studies give researchers opportunities to describe and analyze a social phenomenon that is bound in some way (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). These two school communities provide for a unique opportunity to create a detailed description of these cases given the context of both an individual model that is new to the district and an implementation process that is temporally fixed.

I interviewed members of the school community including teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, and parents at both schools to discover if the school community was talking in ways that indicated shifts in power, who holds power, and the participant's relation to power. Interviews are a powerful way to gain insight into social sectors such as education from the experiences of the very people involved in that sector (Seidman, 2006). I looked at the ways they discussed power itself through their narratives, utterances, discourses, and the like. Because interviews and elicitation devices were my primary data sources, I used a *critical discourse analysis*, or CDA, as my method to analyze these interviews. CDA "is both a theory and a method that examines how social and power relations, identities, and knowledge are constructed

through written, visual, and spoken texts and the contexts of their production and consumption” (Lewis, 2006, p. 374).

Gee (1999) distinguishes between Discourse and discourse as written, visual, and spoken texts or narratives that are happening in society at large and at the individual level. They are both in the background and foreground simultaneously. Discourses with a capital “D” convey assumptions about a particular phenomenon situated in a place and time that the majority of people in a group believe. They tell us about the context in which people are constructing knowledge and making meaning (Gee, 1999; Foucault, 2000; Foucault, 1995). For example, one common Discourse is that most Americans believe that public schools are a necessary component of our modern society. Discourses with a lowercase “d” refer to the actual texts that happen between people inside this larger Discourse. They tell us about what individuals think and act and how they perform inside this larger Discourse. Knowing that most Americans believe that public schools are necessary makes it easy to understand why so many parents talk of schooling as a social good they want for their children.

Because discourse at all levels describes and shapes the thoughts of those participating in it, it is both fruitful to analyze it and crucial to understand its effect and power. Foucault talks about discourse as a practice that forms the individual, much like that of power relations. Because of this tendency to structure and regulate one’s thinking, discourse is a form of power and knowledge (Caldwell, 2007). Gee (1999) furthers this thinking by saying that both levels of discourse are political in nature in that they describe how social goods are being distributed. Looking at discourse is useful for understanding how social goods are being distributed amongst participants, and the issues that may or may not arise due to the equity of these distributions (Gee, 1999). CDA helps to get at what people think about power by looking at their discourses.

In the case of this study, this methodology is particularly well suited for examining what school community members are saying about power in their schools through various forms of discourse about the implementation process.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the following chapter, I will do a literature review, describe the hows and whys of my proposed methodology, and generally discuss how I plan to address the three research questions. The literature review will include the demographics of who is currently working and learning in schools and what that could mean for those school communities. It will discuss the importance of local pedagogies, describe Foucault's notions of power, and explain how these were used to create a conceptual framework. There will also be a review of the history surrounding community schools--and public schools in general--that have led up to this moment in time. In the third chapter the study design, setting, data collection process, and type of analysis of the methodology will be more thoroughly explained. It will also include how the study was conducted at the two community schools, where it was centered, why an intrinsic case study was chosen, who was interviewed, and how the data was analyzed. By exploring what is currently in the literature and creating a sound methodology, this study begins to describe how school community members discuss power, who has power, and shifts in power at two community schools as they implement a community school model.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter, I am going to discuss some of the findings in the literature that support my research with school communities and their relationships to power at their local community schools. I will first review the current demographics of who is learning, teaching, and managing schools at the national and local levels. I will next compare that to who is serving in grass-tops positions associated with school administration, including superintendents, state and federal representatives, school boards, and county commissioners. From there, I will discuss in more depth the impacts of structural racism and white supremacy on Black and Brown people and how the demographic disparities addressed above perpetuate these racial phenomena. Next, I will discuss the history of community schools, some of the models that have come and gone throughout the history of public schools, and where community schools are at present. From there, I will talk about the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy, or what I have reimagined as *local pedagogies*, and how they could mitigate the hegemony created by the current racial imbalances between grass-tops and school communities. Finally, I will give a description of my conceptual framework and how I aim to use Foucault's theories of power in the context of community schools and as to how to include Black and Brown school communities.

Public School Demographics

As stated in the introduction, Black and Brown students make up the majority of the student population in public schools, and by the looks of this trend, those numbers are only going to continue to follow this pattern. According to the NCES (2019), student enrollment for public

schools pre-K to 12th grade in 2015 was 49 percent White, 15 percent Black, 26 percent Latino, and 9 percent for all other groups. That number is projected to change to 45 percent White, 15 percent Black, 29 percent Latino, and 10 percent for all other groups by the year 2027, showing that the number of Black and Brown students is steadily on the rise. As of the 2015-2016 school year, 80 percent of public school teachers were White, compared to 7 percent that identified as Black and 9 percent as Latino. While the Black teacher workforce, specifically, rose from 191,000 in 1988 to 231,000 in 2017, the proportion of Black teachers fell from 8 percent to 7 percent by 2016 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; NCES, 2019). An occupational overview done by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, or AFL-CIO, showed that in 2018, only 28.6 percent of all school administrators identified as Black, Latino or Asian/Pacific Islander (AFL-CIO, 2019). All of this is to say that Black and Brown students are overrepresented in public school populations, while Black and Brown teachers and administrators are underrepresented in the public school workforce. Those learning in public schools are less likely to see themselves reflected in the teachers and administrators that work in schools. As seen in Table 1 from Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019), there is a mismatch happening.

Table 1. Percentage of Students and Teachers by Race

| Table 4 <i>Percentage Students and Teachers, by Race-ethnicity (2011-2012)</i> | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| | Non-minority Total | Minority | | | | | |
| | | Total | <i>Black</i> | <i>Hispanic</i> | <i>Asian</i> | <i>Nat. Amer.</i> | <i>Multiple Races</i> |
| Students | 55.9 | 44.1 | 14.4 | 21.2 | 5.1 | 1.2 | 2.3 |
| Teachers | 82.7 | 17.3 | 6.4 | 7.5 | 1.9 | .4 | 1 |
| | | | | | | | |

Note. Reprinted from *Recruitment, Employment, Retention and the Minority Teacher Shortage*, by Ingersoll, R. May, H., & Collins, G., 2019, Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27(37), p. 14.

Research shows that it is important for Black and Brown students to learn with Black and Brown teachers and administrators. As Ingersoll, May, & Collins (2019) point out, Black and Brown teachers and administrators act as role models for students, have cultural knowledge that benefits instruction, and tend to be motivated by a humanistic connection to their students. There is also an abundance of further research that shows that race matching between students and teachers has improved students' academic outcomes and overall schooling experiences, and that Black and Brown teachers tend to feel a calling to help students in disadvantaged situations (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The problem is Black and Brown teachers are also more likely to transfer between schools or leave education entirely (Ingersoll, 2011 & Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). While recruitment efforts have been successful in hiring more Black and Brown teachers over the past three decades, the attrition rates continue to undermine those efforts, leaving Black

and Brown students mismatched with an overwhelming number of White teachers and administrators.

This overwhelming Whiteness is also present in grass-tops positions. School superintendents are mostly White males. The AASA (2018) did a survey of their members in 2017. Of those that responded, only 4.6 percent identified as a member of a Non-White racial group. Those serving as representatives in state legislatures also follow this trend. According to the Reflective Democracy Campaign (2019) data set, members of the state legislature in which both community schools are housed are currently 82 percent White and 18 percent Non-White. Even most local school boards tend to be governed by mostly White representatives. The racial breakdown of survey respondents for a survey done by the National School Boards Association, or NSBA, in 2018 was 78 percent White, 10 percent Black, 3 percent Latino, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. The local school board membership in the district in which these two community schools are found is 43 percent White and 57 percent Black, and 3 of the 5 county commissioners are Black (Farmer County Public Schools (pseudonym)¹, 2019 & Yee, 2016). However, this is a rarity, and mostly due to intentional political organizing practices centered on racial equity. While this makes it an ideal environment for connecting the school community with their power through integration in school decision-making processes and goal teams, it still appears to be a precarious position compared to the rest of the state. As more and more people move into the area, it is not a guarantee that these exceptional demographic circumstances will hold indefinitely. In fact, North Carolina currently has a White population around 66 percent, and yet 81 percent of the elected officials and 77 percent of county commissioners, specifically, are White (Yee, 2016). Overall, compared to the racial demographics of student populations in public schools, grass-tops leaders that impact education

are not proportionately representative of the students and their families. If the majority of those in grass-tops positions have more relationships with power, what does that mean for the reality that these power relations create, and what's more, whose ideologies are going to be furthered and perpetuated?

White Supremacy and Structural Racism

When most of the students in public schools are from Non-White groups, and yet most of the leaders from classroom teachers to school superintendents are White, public schools inevitably run the risk of supporting a hegemonic cycle that disproportionately benefits White students (Trujillo et al., 2014). White supremacy, structural racism, and hegemony all work together to maintain a power status quo that is over three centuries old. In the United States, as the country was growing in agrarian power and developing plantation systems, it became clear that the elite, White landowners needed a dependable and substantial workforce to work their lands. Although not yet grouped into racial categories at that time, landowners looked to poor Whites and African slave laborers to create and sustain their wealth. Challenges to their power made clear a need to delineate those in the working class along racial lines. The use of African slave labor also furthered this need to justify the atrocities of a slave labor system. As a result, poor Whites were given a special status based on a racial hierarchy placing them at the top while Blacks were relegated to the bottom. As the United States continued to acquire lands across the North American continent and into other parts of the world, other groups were added to this hierarchy under the guise of civilization, or the notion that White, Christian culture was the superior—and therefore most appropriate—culture to be perpetuated (Herbes-Sommers, 2003). This forwarded a belief that despite class, Whites were superior to those of other races. This is fundamentally how White supremacy came to be, and how it continued to uphold Whites over

others. Despite what has been learned about race and the fallacies of such a ranking system, White supremacy persists, especially when it comes to society's structures and institutions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists began to shift their thinking about race from individual acts to the idea that racism is perpetuated through structural forces (Golash-Boza, 2016). The idea of White supremacy has become an internalized narrative that is still alive and well today because of the ways our systems and structures operate and have historically done so. Despite the achievements of the Civil Rights era, when Blacks' right to vote and participate in White society were established as necessary, moral, and ethical ways of life, structural racism continues to plague our modern societies and support ways that disproportionately benefit Whites. Historically it has impacted Black and Brown people's abilities to own homes through the GI bill and the redlining of neighborhoods (Herbes-Sommers, 2003). With Black and Brown people locked out of suburban neighborhoods and huge numbers of White families leaving urban centers for these spaces, schools that had been ordered to desegregate through federal and state mandates, were once again segregated. Because of the ways structural racism works, these re-segregated, minority heavy schools have suffered from lack of funding, less stability with staffing, and decreased access to higher qualified teachers (Ayscue et al., 2018). Structural racism, along with White supremacy, is also at work when educational leaders are disproportionately mismatched with their students. When the majority of the grass-tops leaders impacting education are White, they contribute to this inequitable system. Leonardo (2009) argues that this is due in part to how hidden these ideologies remain. When major decisions about how schools are run are done by mostly White administrators, superintendents, and state legislatures, power that is racially skewed becomes internally normalized. It just is, and school

communities come to accept it as the norm. If school communities internalize that the White way is the right way, then White hegemony is cloaked, normalized, and unchecked (DiAngelo, 2011).

Unfortunately, public schools continue to make this true. When those with the most relationships to power are White, theirs will be the ideas and actions that work to create our current school realities. Their control over how schools create students' understanding of the world around them is enabled and maintained with very little effort (Apple, 2004). Whether or not this is an intentional move, those with the most relationships to power will have the most influence on that power. This is how schools contribute to White supremacy and structural racism despite many of their efforts to do just the opposite. When Whites construct school realities and White hegemony is normed, it gives way to notions of *meritocracy*. Through meritocracy, Black and Brown people are blamed for their lack of power and achievement, while the actual systemic inequities that have been forwarded through White supremacy and structural racism are disregarded, if not totally unnamed (Galindo, C., Sanders, M., & Abel, Y. , 2017). Facing structural racism and White supremacy is paramount because of the ways they damage and hold back Black and Brown families both physically and emotionally (Golash-Boza, 2016). If public schools are to honestly do the work of an equalizer and preparer of 21st citizens, they have to make a commitment to seeing and mitigating the effects of these negative institutional forces (Trujillo et al., 2014). Fortunately, there is hope of doing just that when Black and Brown school community members use their relationships to power to affect their public schools. Although grass-tops may be disproportionately White, integrating the school community could help to bring more racial balance and representation to public schools' decision-making processes. Their participation could influence students' understanding of the world around them.

Their ideologies have the potential to shape school realities. Through their collective power there is possibility that White supremacy and structural racism can be named and challenged.

Community Schools

One way that public schools can begin to harness the power of their school communities and challenge current educational hegemony is by implementing a community school model. Community schools are public schools that democratically serve those learning and working in schools through intense and purposeful involvement of the actual school community. They offer new ways of crafting participatory decision-making processes that make space for the funds of knowledge of Black and Brown families and build leadership within the school community. This form of collaborative leadership can be considered both an element of programming and an implementation policy (NEPC, 2017). According to the U.S. Department of Education, “community schools provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students’ family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children” (Dept. of Education, 2018, para. 2). They can offer services, programs, and supports based on what the school community has identified as real needs (NEPC, 2017). Using the results of an intentional listening project that is done with all of the members of the school community, they analyze and determine what the assets, needs, and visions of the community school are (NEA, 2018). They are held accountable by the school community through various shared goal teams composed of students, school staff, teachers, families, and community partners. Frequently heralded as a turn-around model for struggling schools, community schools offer so much more to their school communities. They address common problems in schools regarding community involvement, discipline practices, professionalization of teachers, students’ needs outside of schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and inclusive leadership

(CPD, 2016; NEA, 2018; NEPC, 2017). According to the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, schools need to implement “evidence-based” approaches to ensure they are improving student outcomes (NEPC, 2017). These approaches are broken down into tiers outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. ESSA Evidence Tiers

| Table 1: ESSA Evidence Tiers | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Tier 1 | Tier 2 | Tier 3 | Tier 4 |
| Strong Evidence | Moderate Evidence | Promising Evidence | Emerging Evidence |
| At least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study | At least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study | At least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias | Demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that the intervention is likely to improve student outcomes Includes ongoing evaluation efforts |

Note. Reprinted from *Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement*, by Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J., 2017, Report from NEPC, p. 5.

Community schools could easily fall into the Tier 1 category given the opportunities they provide for structured experimentation that is based on evidence and supported through research. In addition to providing the “evidence-based” approaches required by the ESSA, they also give school communities an opportunity to build schools that serve and represent the communities themselves (NEPC, 2017). By building an infrastructure of community partnerships with institutions of higher education, non-profits, and faith-based organizations, community schools have the ability to provide students with the social, emotional, and physical supports they need to

lead healthy, productive lives—things frequently enjoyed by students living in more favorable conditions. It is both a place and a set of partnerships (NEPC, 2017). What makes them so potentially effective is how they create, broaden, and utilize assets from within the school community (Galindo, Sanders, & Abel, 2017). Community schools do this by giving the school community the autonomy to decide for themselves what that means. Considering how current hegemonies work to keep power in the hands of the grass-tops, it would stand to reason that one would want communities to localize and decide for themselves what it means to be a community school. Because no two school communities are alike in every way, community schools offer flexible structures that allow for both comparability across schools and local pedagogies, a concept I will delve into further in the following section (NEPC, 2017).

While it is important that community schools be defined in flexible ways to offer local school communities an opportunity to create a school that fits their local needs, the community schools involved in this study are using a particular community school model. Coming out of the research done by the Center for Popular Democracy and adopted by the National Education Association, these community schools are defined by a distinct set of six pillars and four mechanisms to bring the model to fruition (NEA, 2018). The pillars define the foci for the community school and the mechanisms offer a means for implementing the model. The six pillars address culturally sustaining curriculum, high quality teaching, wrap around supports, restorative discipline practices, parent and community partnerships, and inclusive leadership. They are not an exhaustive list of what community schools can offer, but they are research backed needs that community schools should minimally address. The mechanisms are an asset and needs assessment of the school and local community, a strategic plan for implementing the model, partnerships with local businesses and grassroots organizations to help put that plan into

action, and a *community school organizer*, or CSO, at the building level to help facilitate the process and maintain partnerships to fulfill the school community's needs (CPD, 2016). The community school organizer leads most of the duties related to the community school, and is a necessary component for the model itself. They usually work closely with the principal and other stakeholders to plan and implement strategies aligned with the assets and needs of the community school, and serve as the lead on collaborating with community partners and school decision-making bodies (CAS, 2011; CPD, 2016; CCC, 2020; NEA, 2016). Despite the multiple definitions for community schools, this particular NEA model is the one that was chosen to be replicated in North Carolina; and for the purposes of this paper, when I refer to community schools, I am referring to one that follows NEA's six pillars and four mechanisms as defined above.

Community schools of the past.

Unlike many educational trends that proliferate today, the community school model is not a new concept. Over the past century *progressive education* proponents, local communities, and educators have forwarded several community school movements. Progressive education is a student-centered way of teaching that is democratized and reliant on the relationships that exist between teachers, students, and the school community as whole (Cuban, 1993). However, many of these community school models barely got off the ground before they began to fade back into time. Less about their viability and sustainability, these schools faced external influences and pressures present during each of their inceptions that impacted their overall longevity.

Community schools have served different purposes over time. They have been used as social centers, vehicles for reform, and community anchors (NEPC, 2017). As Rogers (1998) points out in his piece on the history of community schools, the social center movement that ran from 1900-

1916, the social reconstructivist movement of the 1930s, and the Black Nationalists' community-controlled schools of the 1960s and 1970s, which only represent a few of the better known movements, were not without their external challenges. Met with internal conflicts, war, economic depression, and civil unrest, innovative ideas like community schools were particularly vulnerable. However, it is important to look at these historical models and learn from their experiences in order to build stronger community schools in the present.

Social centers.

For one, many of the models from the past attempted to bring together various types of people in their community without reconciling collective needs with individualistic ideas. As Rogers (1998) points out, social center models in New York at the turn of the last century looked like an opportunity to bring together a variety of moral perspectives. It was not unusual for citizens to attend public debates at that time where people of all kinds came together to discuss and debate pressing topics. However, while these social centers openly extolled this notion of collectivity, it was not true that all involved held the same beliefs about home life, politics, morality, and all of the other topics they strove to bring to cohesion. This inability to reconcile collective and individual interests is exactly what critics latched onto, claiming that the social centers were unraveling what little community actually existed. Further, as social centers increasingly became soap boxes for public health proponents, it became clear that wholesome communities looked very different for the various cultural groups using the centers at the time (Rogers, 1998). Ultimately, it would be these differences that would undermine community schools as social centers.

Community schools of the present would do well to make an effort to understand how social centers failed to be a lasting model, and bridge the gap between school community and

individual interests. Still today there are smaller pockets and groups of people inside each community, each with their own ideologies that need to be considered and upheld. Community schools will need to be able to address both individuals and communities in order to survive for the long term. Regardless of whether or not current community schools try to recreate social centers, helping connect school communities to their relationships to power could be one way to bolster the viability of community schools in general.

Understanding assets and needs.

Another way this could be done is by looking deeply at what the school communities themselves face in their day to day lives. Other models of the past faltered when they failed to impact forces outside of education that continued to plague a community despite the community school's best efforts. A federal effort to rebuild a collapsing coal mining community in West Virginia in the 1930s was led by a community educator by the name of Elsie Clapp. Coming from outside the community, Clapp failed to fully look at long term solutions for the community economically. Although her community schools received praise and support initially, her lack of knowledge of the actual mining communities' needs undermined her ability to create a sustainable community school that addressed the social, political, and economic needs of the community at large (Rogers, 1998).

Proponents of community schools today need to fully understand what school communities need, what they bring as community assets, and what they want for themselves in order to prevent this from happening once again (NEA, 2018). Without fully understanding and engaging the school community, vital information needed for change is lost and there can be a tendency to fall back on current hegemonic practices. Before community schools can even begin to be implemented, those attempting to make change must first ask the school communities to

state their needs, assets, and visions. A thorough asset and needs assessment is a crucial step in ensuring the success of a community school effort.

Accountability and measurement.

Using an asset and needs assessment is also crucial for accountability. Another issue that community schools in the past often faced directly was with accountability and measurement. Starting in 1930, the Progressive Education Association, or PEA, launched an eight-year study that gave 30 high schools autonomy over their curriculum (Aiken, 1942). They wanted to see if graduates would still be college ready despite a strict adherence to what was then considered a highly structured college preparation curriculum. As the project unfolded, the schools encountered many challenges, one of which involved creating testing measures for all of the various curriculum strands at each of the schools (Kridel, 2007). Ralph Tyler, an up-and-coming American educator whose expertise was in assessment and evaluation, worked extensively alongside teachers to help them create measures to go along with their instructional content. However, proponents of a college entrance exam balked at this, claiming it to be too messy and experimental. Despite fairly convincing results that the study had been successful in preparing students for college, this would become a critique that would eventually undo many of the innovative progressive education models happening at the time (Aikin, 1942; Kliebard, 2004; Kridel, 2007; and Labaree, 2012). Unfortunately, just as the PEA was releasing the results of this extensive study, World War II was looming in everyone's minds. Americans shifted from a need to experiment to a need for the security of a back-to-basics approach (Kliebard, 2004). The story of the Eight-Year Study and some of the positive results they uncovered became secondary to the needs of the war.

In this moment of standards and accountability, new community school models need to be sure that as they localize, they also are able to address ways they can be compared to other schools. As they push for local, community control, they must also be sure to address the concerns of assessment, accountability, and measurement to ensure that they are not disregarded as messy and unaccountable as many of the community school models were in the past. Although testing and accountability may or may not be of paramount importance for student success in public schools, it is a narrative that most educators and school communities have internalized as a needed component, and therefore should be addressed if community schools hope to make their mark in education.

Past exemplars.

Though past attempts at implementing community schools were cut short or never fully realized, educators and school communities alike continue to return to the concept because of the potential it holds for students and their families (Rogers, 1998). Despite some of the sustainability issues community schools have faced in the past, there have also been some community school moments that arguably stand out as exemplars. Just as those that were short lived, I believe these moments of school reform offer hope to those looking to once again revive the notion of community schooling. Looking at these models could prove helpful when considering future community school iterations.

Dewey's laboratory school.

One of the earliest of these exemplars was John Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. While working at the university as the head of the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy, John Dewey set up a laboratory school where many of the faculty and staff sent their children daily. Serving as the director from 1896 to 1904, Dewey

hoped to put into practice some of his theories around participatory democracy, intelligence cultivation, and real-world problem-solving learning experiences (Benson et al., 2017). Poised right at the beginning of the progressive era that roughly ran from the beginning of the 20th century to the mid 1930s, the doors to this community school opened up in 1894 (Kliebert, 2004). As a firm believer in the school's ability to reform society as a whole, Dewey believed that it started with a child and community centered curriculum and pedagogy that worked to develop the personality, individuality, and intelligence of the child. Because the Dewey School was mostly attended by the children of the faculty and staff of the university, it was in a unique position to rethink and innovate schooling, which at the time had come under scrutiny for being rote and uninspiring (Kliebard, 2004 & Labaree, 2012). The lab school was intended to be an experimental school community where the child and community's needs were front and center. Also intended as a space where progressive education theory could be put into practice, Dewey strove to make his school representative of the community at large, but in miniature. Students were to have the freedom to explore, actively participate, and make actual contributions to this unique community school.

What made this an exemplar community school is that it was truly one of the first of its kind. Most, if not all, community schools that would come into being over the next century were due in part to the Laboratory School. It set a precedent about experimentation, democratically run schools, and project-based learning that many community schools would mimic in some capacity. Unfortunately, the Laboratory School was just that, a laboratory where Dewey and his followers were able to set up ways to test and experiment with their educational theories that did not resemble the natural patterns of schooling and the community at large. As Benson et al. (2017) point out, "instead of functioning as a natural laboratory that experimentally studied the

real, complex links between school and community, the school was effectively isolated from the community and society in which its pupils lived” (p. 53). Many of the practices used in the school were far too removed to implement in everyday public schools. However, given these shortcomings, the Laboratory School is still an important example of community schooling, mostly due to the influence it has had on the notion of community school models over time. Whether or not the Laboratory School was ever really able to reach the ideals Dewey set forth and translate those goals to public schools in general, it was the thinking that came out of this school environment and the lasting impact it has had on the way community schools are visualized and run. The goal of creating intelligent citizens that develop through project-based learning and community centered curriculum has been the impetus for so many other progressive, liberal, and renegade school communities that have come into being in the last century. If school communities are intentional in their participation and thinking, it is possible to learn from the Laboratory School, avoid isolation from the community itself, and still create a space for innovation and experimentation.

The Block Nurseries.

Another shining example of community schooling started in the early 1960s, following the release of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, and the creation of Title I funding. A group of parents, headed by an activist organizer, started two small nursery schools that were created to serve the surrounding school community. Using funding provided from the Johnson Administration’s Head Start program, the group set up two schools in the heart of East Harlem to serve the children of a predominantly underserved Puerto Rican community. Calling themselves the Block Nurseries, the schools were run by a parent dominated, led, and run board of trustees from 1965 until about 1980 (Roderick, 2001). While the classes were taught by

certified teachers coming out of local liberal arts colleges in the area espousing very Deweyian notions of progressive education, parents also worked alongside these teachers as assistants, front office staff, parent liaisons, and just about every other position that needed to be filled.

What really set this community school iteration apart was how extensively the school community participated in its inception, implementation, and management. Instead of using a typical school staff assembled from communities outside of where the nurseries were housed, the parents of the surrounding school community itself contributed to the creation and everyday maintenance of the schools. Started by parents meeting in living rooms and discussing the needs of their children and community, they were able to dream up a community school that centered on their assets and needs. Going from door to door, these same community members reached out to other parents, appealing to their experiences in schools and the challenges they faced dealing with the White hegemonic educational practices of the day. It was parents that found the buildings that housed the nurseries, and parents that cleaned and set up the classrooms. It was parents that promoted the schools and canvassed their neighborhoods for students. It was parents that hired—and sometimes fired—the teaching staff at the schools. It was parents that fought for the schools when they came under fire by various bureaucracies (Roderick, 2001). However, money that was used to get the Block Nurseries off the ground in the first place became a point of contention when the schools were unable to produce a paper trail showing how it was used. After much debate and direct action, the board was eventually forced to close the schools or face take over by the city run Head Start program. Like many of the other community schools of the past, it was unable to resist the tendency towards status quo that keeps public schools in a state of inertia. Still, the Block Nurseries were an exemplar community school, and a testament to what parents are capable of in their school communities given the opportunity for engagement and

leadership. Community schools of the present and future should look to the ways in which the Block Nurseries were able to develop and use the school community's relationships to power. It was through these relationships that they were able to not only initiate two community schools, but also run and manage what went on inside those schools every day.

Central Park East Schools.

Following the Block Nurseries was another exemplary community school focused on serving predominantly low income, Black and Brown students in one of New York City's boroughs. Heeding a call for help for inner-city schools commonplace at the time, a small alternative community school was about to open its doors in a run-down building in Harlem. Sharing a space with another traditional elementary school, Central Park East welcomed its first class of students in the fall of 1974 (Bensman, 1987). With the support of a very forward-thinking district superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, and the tenacity of an educator by the name of Deborah Meier, a group of educators got a very unique opportunity to build an elementary school from the ground up. Much like the current push for standards and accountability, Central Park East Schools were fighting against increasing pressure from Federal and State educational entities to follow mandates about what needed to be happening in schools. Steeped in Dewey's principles of progressive education, this community school used a student-centered, *open classroom approach* that encouraged open spaces, small group instruction, correlated subject matter, expression, and student decision-making (Cuban, 1993). Over the next decade, what started as one school would expand to three, and in September of 1985, they admitted their first class of seventh graders. Despite the fact that it served student populations known for their lack of success and achievement, CPE's state reading test scores showed that over 70% of their students were consistently testing above grade level (Bensman, 1987).

Although their student achievement scores were exemplary, what really stood out about this community school was how the CPE educators harnessed the locality of the school community for their pedagogical purposes. Located in one of the poorest neighborhoods of New York City and teaching some of the most cast aside student populations, CPE exemplified what could be achieved through a community school that was authentically rooted in that community and created content and curriculum based on that community. These open classrooms gave students that were traditionally served in some of the most restrictive learning environments a chance to do some self-directed learning in the very places they lived. Whether they were doing research on indigenous animals via local museums and environments in their actual city, or doing hands on studies of New York's natural environment by visiting the beaches close to their homes, they had an exemplary way of creating authentic, localized instruction (Bensman, 1987). Unlike some of the other widely recognized community schools, these were not the elite children of university faculty. These were students from East and Central Harlem learning in a school environment that was based on instruction in and about their community. CPE was a great example of progressive, open classroom type instruction in practice. Unlike many of the other community school iterations, CPE schools are still alive and well today.

Community schools of the 21st century.

Currently there are over 5000 community schools in operation today, with that number steadily on the rise. According to a research and literature review done by the National Education Policy Center in 2017, ESSA has provided more funding for community schools than No Child Left Behind, which could account for this increase. They can be found in localities such as New York City, Philadelphia, Newark, Austin, Salt Lake City, Oakland, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Las Vegas (NEPC, 2017). Some of the other findings

presented in the report addressed implementation, positive relationships, and a need for more rigorous study. The NEPC (2017) consistently found that the keys to providing the best outcomes in community schools are “the substance of the intervention and the quality of its implementation” (p. 9). They also found that community schools have been able to encourage positive school and community relationships and close achievement gaps between groups. Through positive relationship development they are better able to promote social capital development for school communities as a whole, which could be one of the reasons for this success. However, they cautioned that sufficient time must be given to community schools to foster these relationships and build collaboration throughout the implementation process in order to meet with success. Finally, because most of the existing community school models present today have been turnaround models, the NEPC calls for more research. Most of the current research is an assessment of student and school outcomes. Additional research is needed to better understand the overall effectiveness of community school models (NEPC, 2017).

Molly Stark elementary.

One of the earlier community school projects was started at Molly Stark Elementary School in Bennington, Vermont in the fall of 1995 (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). Like many other community schools, Molly Stark Elementary was struggling. It was both literally and metaphorically on the other side of the tracks, and many members of the school community wanted to see that change. What started as a small focus group of 15—mostly staff and three community members—would soon become a full-service community school project. The team spent the first year prior to implementation doing a full needs assessment where they looked at community statistics and state data, and collected survey information and suggestions from the school community. Their goal was to determine what were some of the most immediate needs of

their students and families. The following school year, they developed a five-year plan that focused on health and wellness, curriculum and instruction, family involvement, and social responsibility. In their book *Inside Full-Service Community Schools* (2002), the authors detail Molly Stark's story and how they fought to become a full-service community school.

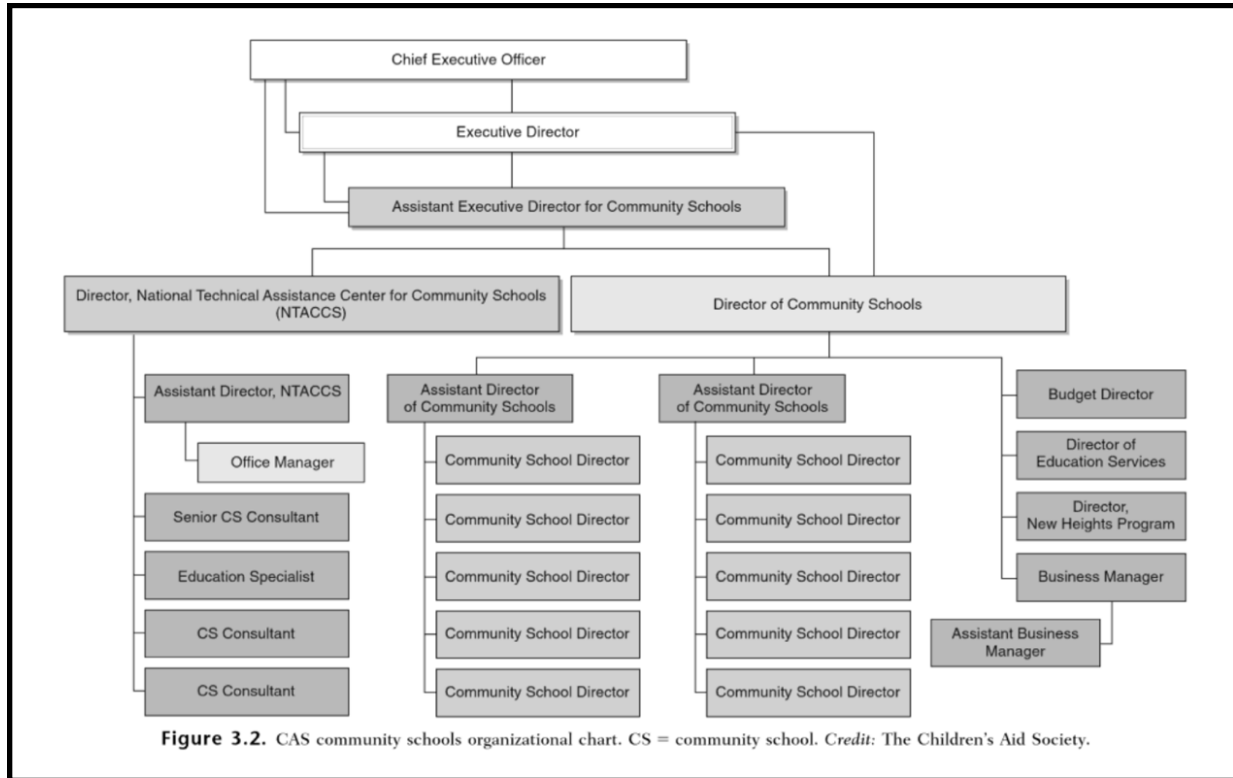
Fortunately, their work was met with some fairly inspiring early results. For one, parents that had traditionally not been that actively involved started to participate and engage with the school community. From 1996 to 1999, the percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences rose from 87 percent to 98 percent. Another finding showed that discipline referrals went from 100 per month to 35 per month. Yet another result was that the Developmental Reading Assessment, a running record given to second graders, showed that between 65 and 75 percent of students met or exceeded state standards (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). According to school achievement scores from 1997 to 2001, Molly Stark's fourth graders made improvement in every subject as compared to district and state scores, and were either near, at, or above state standards in every category. What's more, this community school's success was not an isolated circumstance.

Children's Aid Society.

The Children's Aid Society, or CAS, in New York City has been one of the pioneers in building effective community schools. What started at two schools in Washington Heights in 1992, has blossomed into a network of several community schools throughout NYC (CAS, 2020). In the beginning, it was their mission to create a "one-stop shop" type community school model, where students and their families would have access to education, social services, and health care (Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005, p. 14). Like some of the other models that came before them, they were also centered on empowering parents through opportunities for adult

education and parent participation. There was a three-way partnership between the Board of Education, CAS, and parents. Before they even broke ground on creating their first school, the CAS took the time to build community support and develop relationships by working with school community members and grass-tops leaders alike. In order to build a sustainable base, they spoke with local residents, the teacher's union, community social agencies, and elected officials (Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005). However, what really set this project apart from other community school models, was how much time and energy they spent creating an organizational and governance infrastructure dedicated to collaborative leadership, building relationships at multiple levels, outlining the role of the community school coordinator at the school and district levels, and authentically working with the families in their school communities (Dryfoos, Quinn, Barkin, 2005). Because of their tenacity, the fact that their efforts have been so successful, and the overall demand for implementation in other locales, they were able to create a widely referenced community schools handbook entitled *Building Community*

Schools: A Guide for Action (Children’s Aid Society, 2011).



Note. Reprinted from *Community schools in action: Lessons from a decade of practice*, by Dryfoos, J.G., Quinn, J., & Barkins, C., 2005, p.33.

Between 1993 and 1999, a formative and three-part impact evaluation were conducted centered on two of CAS’s initial community schools—Intermediate School 218 and Primary School 5. The evaluations were conducted by a team from Fordham University’s School of Education and Social Services (Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005). What they found were improvements with student outcomes, school environment, parent involvement, and implementation. Compared to other public schools in the district, students’ reading and math scores improved at both schools between 1995 and 1997. Evaluators frequently noted how the community schools they entered “felt cheerful, busy, and welcoming” (Dryfoos, Quinn, &

Barkin, 2005, p. 171). Attendance rates for both students and teachers were higher at both community schools. In addition, parent involvement was significantly higher—78 percent at PS 5 and 147 percent at IS 218—compared to others in the district. Even only three years after implementation, large numbers of children and their families were receiving health and mental health services at their community schools. Although the CAS had plans to implement 10 community school models, due to their successes they currently have 22 community schools in their network and continue to help other districts across the United States plan and implement community schools that reflect their local school communities (Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005; CAS, 2020).

Center for Popular Democracy.

Another report done by the Center for Popular Democracy (2016) focused on some of the successes of some of the more current community school models. One of the most widely recognized community school projects is in operation in Cincinnati Public Schools. In 2016 CPS was named Ohio's Highest Achieving Urban District. At that time, they had already converted 43 of their 55 public schools into community schools. From 2006 to 2016, they were able to reduce the achievement gap between White students and Black and Brown students from 14.5 percent to 4.5 percent. Their graduation rate went from 51 percent to 82 percent. Further, in that same time, they saw 62 percent of their students attend college (CPD, 2016). Reagan High--a community school in Austin, TX--saw their attendance rates increase from 88 percent to 95 percent and their graduation rates increase from 48 percent to 90 percent from 2009 to 2016. In 2010, the school was barely able to offer families any sort of support services aside from the occasional computer classes. However, by 2015 they had created a full-time Family Resource Center with a bilingual social worker on staff that offered adult and parenting classes for

interested families (CPD, 2016). At the Social Justice Humanitas Academy in Los Angeles, CA, attendance rates went from 62 percent to 80 percent, and their college enrollment rates went to 99 percent from 2011 to 2015. They were also able to implement financial literacy, housing assistance, health care referrals, and legal support to help families and the school community at large. While these are only a few examples of what is happening currently, community schools are making an impact on school community empowerment.

Local pedagogies.

Not only do school communities have the potential to mitigate some of the disparities created by power imbalances, they also have the potential to create and inform what I have termed *local pedagogies*. I derived this term as a way to recognize that all American public school communities are made up of multiple cultures. In order for pedagogy to be culturally sustaining and relevant, it needs to address this multiplicity. Local pedagogies are locally based ways of schooling arrived at through a collaboration of multicultural school communities that happen inside community schools. They are pedagogies that are built on the assets and needs of the community that are focused on solving real time issues impacting that school community. While these pedagogies do have some structure that ensures all students receive some similar basic education, they are also flexible enough to allow school communities some level of locally centered interpretation and practice. Local pedagogies are different from culturally sustaining pedagogies in that they tend to be a mixture of cultures working together to serve everyone in the community as they focus on local problems within the community. While this obviously includes culturally sustaining and relevant practices, local pedagogies are what I believe to be an amalgamation of these culturally sustaining practices that are orchestrated together, serving some needs over others as appropriate for the school community at any given time. It is a way for

school community members to insert themselves into a community school's pedagogy through leadership, participation, and their relationships to power. It is an attempt to create an educational space that is open and dynamic enough to house all of the assets and needs of a community without perpetuating the same hegemonies public schools have served for years. It is a practice that exposes students to the triumphs and struggles of their diverse peers, and from this, learn to reconnect to their humanity.

This is not a novel concept. Local pedagogies have been discussed in some capacity in the education literature for over a century. John Dewey, forefather of public education, idealist, and philosopher, believed that education needed to be relevant to those learning and working in schools. He advocated for project learning that focused on the problems school communities faced (Dewey, 1980). He wanted to give students chances for self-direction and the chance to find their calling through authentic school practices. He believed that enabling students and school staff more autonomy over what was happening in schools set them up to in turn connect to one another. This connection allowed those participating in society as a whole the chance to use their expertise to form and reform that society's structures. When he says, "a society is stably organized when each individual is doing that for which he has an aptitude by nature in such a way as to be useful to others" (Dewey, 1980, p. 94), he is declaring that education has a responsibility to bring to fruition the school community's potential. For Dewey this paved the way for students to build their intelligence through reflective, real-world problem solving. It also gave those learning and working in schools the chance to practice participatory democracy (Benson et al., 2017). It was his hope that schools could prepare students for active and wholly engaged decision-making processes impacting their communities and society at large (Benson et al., 2017). When this does not happen and schools serve business interests over those of

democracy and human need, Dewey warned that schools ran the risk of being “mechanical and slavish” (Dewey, 1980, p. 117).

Gail Furman (2002), a professor from Washington State University in Educational Leadership, has been studying “schools as community” for the past two decades. She looks at the school community through a postmodern lens in three ways: descriptive, constructive, and deconstructive. Descriptive postmodernism calls for a much less modernist way of thinking about school communities in light of the ever-diversifying members of these communities. Constructive postmodernism calls for an acceptance of otherness and willingness to work with difference through an interconnected web of persons and cultures. Deconstructive postmodernism warns that if modernism continues to prevail, school communities will continue to divide groups and promote hegemony. She has a new vision for the school community that offers belonging despite difference and a space where members can feel protected even when amongst a variety of different people, cultures, and traditions. Her thinking challenges future educators to embrace cultural differences as tools for rethinking and reshaping school communities in postmodern ways that serve a variety of viewpoints (Furman, 2002). Furman’s thinking about school as community is a description and rationale for local pedagogies. It gives school communities a way to anchor themselves in thinking that incorporates diversity, a willingness to work together, and a way to mitigate hegemony. Taking these local pedagogies and firmly grounding them in community schools that reflect the needs, wants, and aspirations of all the people to whom they are accountable is a way to put Furman’s thinking into practice.

Conceptual Framework

A study by Trujillo et al. (2014) studied the oral histories of eight members of the Oakland Unified School District. Some of the participants came from grass-tops positions such

as the school superintendent and school board, while others were a high school student and teacher from the school community itself. Although all of the participants agreed that the district wide community school initiative was well received, those least engaged by the district during its implementation—Black and Brown communities and those in lower socioeconomic standing—were the most skeptical about the district’s ability to achieve their aims. Many of the participants did not believe that the district was authentically interested in engaging all members of the school community, and therefore did not believe that much would be changed. Perception is oftentimes one’s reality. No matter how well thought out an implementation plan is, all community schools in the making run this risk. Therefore, it is imperative that power be analyzed in conjunction with implementation research in order to understand the school community’s perceptions of power shifts, help them gain access to their power, and authentically build more relationships to their power. As this study shows, even given a successful community school environment that is district backed, power shifts from the grass-tops to the school community are not guaranteed.

Foucauldian-inspired.

To better understand the ways members of the school community can access their relationships to power and the importance of this component, I used a Foucauldian-inspired notions of power to guide my analysis. The main tenets of this Foucauldian-inspired look at power are the following: 1) power is everywhere and flows in capillary like ways from people, groups, institutions, and the like; 2) because of this fluidity, everyone and everything is defined by power just as power is defined by everyone and everything; 3) because people and power are mutually constitutive, everyone has access to power through their relationships; 4) shifts and/or changes in power, how it behaves, and who has access to it can be made through these

relationships; and 5) discourses could reveal these shifts and/or changes. By looking at how participants discuss, describe, and talk about their experiences with power throughout the community school implementation process, I have attempted to uncover whether or not school community members perceive power shifts from grass-tops to the community itself and how they are gaining access to decision-making power through their relationships. Although not a formal Foucauldian theory, this inspired way of looking at Foucault offers a way of defining power, understanding how it behaves, and harnessing it through relationships.

Agency.

Borrowing from the social sciences, agency is the capacity or state of being that allows one to act independently and make free choices (“Agency”, n.d.). It seems important to address this briefly due to the implied nature of agency that stems from talking about power, shifting power, and building relationships with power. Foucault had some contradictory ways of defining agency. In some texts, Foucault looked at agency and autonomy in much the same ways, whereby he out and out denounced the notion that one can exist, think, or act outside of the context from which they come (Foucault, 1990). In other texts, he talked about the possibility of a decentered type agency that happens when individuals or subjects refuse to engage in or knowingly counter long held Discourses (Caldwell, 2007). One can exhibit agency by engaging in *discursive resistance*, where one refuses to reiterate power inequities by engaging in the discourses that perpetuate those power inequities (Foucault, 1990). Following this line of thinking, school community members could be exercising their agency and participating in discursive resistance when they begin to redefine and redistribute power in atypical ways. In his piece on Foucault and agency, Bevir (1999) talks about an “excitable” Foucault that rejects agency just as he does autonomy, and a “composed” Foucault that recognizes that individuals

can make very different decisions within the same context thereby exhibiting agency (p. 68).

Although I do not make any explicit references to agency in this study, and consider that to be an entirely different theoretical direction I could possibly take in the future, I tend towards the composed Foucault that realizes it to be a part of understanding and resisting existing power relations. For the purposes of this study, agency is embedded in the ways participants do or do not choose to engage in typical discourses that favor grass-tops power structures.

Manifestations of power.

Many times, people think of power as law or government. To some power is housed in a place of authority rather than a force that is all around us. According to Foucault (1990), these are actually just temporary manifestations of power. Power is more like a mass of relations that flow from one manifestation to another. All of those involved with power can be shaped by it and influence it simultaneously. Power is informed by those in relation to it, and as this happens, those in relation to it are also informed, built, and constructed. It is a mutually constitutive, or dialogic, process that happens through interaction and relationship. When one has a relationship with their power they are engaging with others and making their wants, needs, and intentions known in that space. As the forces involved with power bump into and react to one another, power can be shifted in ways that allow one force more power over another (Foucault, 1990). However, this is not a static position, and as one force exerts itself, it is capable of either gaining or giving away power. As with grass-tops and school communities, those that understand their relationships to power—and know how to wield it—are capable of harnessing more power for their particular cause. Currently, it would seem that grass-tops hold the power in ways that keep it in one place and manifest it for their purposes, but Foucault argues that this does not have to always be the case.

School communities are capable of manifesting power in the same ways as do grass-tops through their community school. Whether it is through an implementation process, a leadership team, or the daily workings of the community school itself, these schools offer up a space where community members can practice using their power. It is mostly a matter of relating to power, organizing, and building power collectively; and community schools offer a platform from which this can happen. As Foucault points out in *Power/Knowledge* (1980), power is more of a social practice in which everyone is involved, rather than a position outside of society. In this “capillary form of existence”, it is ingrained in everything we do, think, say, etc. (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). The power is there for the taking, so to speak, just so long as one is willing to act and relate. While law and governmental bodies can oftentimes dictate how power is distributed and used, school communities are capable of infiltrating and influencing these bodies or manifestations through their participation in their local community school, thereby directing power in ways that suit their purposes and ideologies. As school community members participate in these bodies, they help to direct power and recreate it in ways that reflect their wants and needs. When school community members serve on local school boards or join the Parent Teacher Association at their community school, they build relationships to power. When parents and community members are represented in the decision-making processes with their community school’s leadership teams, they build relationships with their power. What’s more, when school communities build their relationships to power and participate, there could be more opportunities for the school to reflect those influences (Trujillo et al., 2014; Galindo, Sanders, & Abel, 2017). The more they are present and participating, the more relationships they have to their power, and the more capable they become of shaping school practices to fit their wants and needs.

Community schools offer spaces for this to happen in authentic ways through data collection and relationships. Unlike other traditional public schools, community schools make intentional efforts to gather data from the school community members themselves. They seek to understand what is currently working and what needs to be changed, all according to the people working and learning in those schools every day. Most traditional public schools rely solely on governing structures outside the school's purview to inform what happens in schools.

Community schools also offer opportunities for connecting school community members to their power through participation and representation. At traditional public schools, parents may or may not actively participate on the school's improvement team, and PTAs are more involved with school events. During my time in the classroom, parents were mostly tokenized on these teams, and the power to make school wide changes was usually held by grass-tops leaders.

Community schools, however, have the potential to encourage and harness the power of their school community members. They are a stage on which school community members are represented and encouraged to build their relationships to power.

Foucault (1990) says, "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 93). People think of power as a thing because it is referred to using language that makes it seem like a solid entity, but in reality, it is a system of relations moving and changing as different actors relate to it. While power may not be held in the community school structure itself, it is a space where power can be cultivated, shaped, and used for the purposes of building a better school. Just as power is produced by one system of forces, such as superintendents or state legislators, it can be produced or changed by other forces, such as parents and teachers. Power is created through a system of explicit strategies, strategies that

can be enacted from any group or direction. It is a matter of planning and participation that makes this so. Parent organizations are just as capable of influencing power as any governmental think tank, given that a strategy and plan of action are initiated. There is no conspiracy or top-down actor holding power. As Foucault pointed out, these are only temporary manifestations of power. Like the blood in one's veins, it can flow from top to bottom and back. Thinking of power in these ways not only makes it easier to understand why and how it is currently housed in the ways it is, but it also allows one to see that shifts are always possible. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1990), Foucault says:

Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships (p. 96).

Just as grass-tops school leaders rely on their institutional networks to control power and use it for their purposes, so too can others given that they use a strategy. Revolution is possible, even if it does not resemble acts of violence so often associated with it. Power revolutions could quite literally be manifested as the community schools themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will discuss in more detail exactly how I approached the need for more research surrounding community schools. From the literature review it is clear that there is a need to rethink schooling and how public schools are harnessing the power of the local school community. Community schools in all of their various iterations could be an answer to this need to harness that power. However, as pointed out earlier, implementation and school community perception are crucial parts of a community school's success (Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005; Rogers, 1998; Bensman, 1987; Benson et al., 2017; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). When school communities are disconnected from their power or do not believe that a community school plan has their best interests in mind, it can negatively impact the community school's capability for success (Trujillo et al., 2014). This is compounded by the plethora of modern school reform initiatives that public schools have tried to accommodate over the past two decades. In order to cultivate school-level buy in and encourage earnest implementation fidelity, community school proponents need to first understand how the school community perceives their power. In the following pages I will discuss how I studied these perceptions through the study design, sample selection, data collection, analysis, transferability, and researcher bias and assumptions.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to uncover and describe how school community members talk about power, who has power, and shifts in power. My research question is how do school community members talk about power, who has power, and shifts in power at two community schools in a small urban district in North Carolina as they implement a community school

model? To answer this question, I studied Pointe and Harrison Elementary¹ as they completed year two and embarked on year three's implementation of their community school model using a qualitative multiple case study method. Using interviews and elicitation device activities, I examined and interpreted how participants talk about power, those that hold it, and how that has shifted throughout implementation.

Qualitative research.

Because of my intention to interpret and describe how the school community participants talk about power, I found that a qualitative research method was most appropriate. Creswell and Poth (2018) present the following main characteristics of qualitative research: natural setting, researcher as key element, reflexivity, multiple methods, inductive logic, participant perspectives, context dependence, emergent design, holistic account, and rich descriptions. For one, the research conducted for this study did not happen in a laboratory setting, nor were participants asked to make changes or adjustments for the sake of measurement and hypothesis testing. This study was only concerned with how participants perceived power in the natural setting of their community school.

In addition, as the researcher, I was a key element to the study. My previous participation with the implementation process, my reflexivity, and my background in public school instruction were all important components for interpreting my findings. Qualitative research is not centered on finding an objective way of seeing reality. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) point out, it is constructivist in nature "in the sense that it is concerned with how the complexities of the social and cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood, in a particular context, and at a particular point in time" (p. 41). Instead of objectivity, it expects and embraces the subjectivity that the researcher brings to the study, and harnesses it for the purposes of interpretation. Using

the researcher's background, underlying assumptions, and experiences, qualitative research seeks to uncover themes and findings related to what the participants think about their realities (Lichtman, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In order for me to uncover these themes and findings, I used multiple methods of data collection. For one, I interviewed participants from the school community to uncover how they talked about power. Secondly, I used elicitation devices in my interviews to both come to an agreement with participants about what power means and explore shifts that had occurred in the power structure before and after the initial implementation process. Finally, I kept an in-depth analytic journal to record thoughts, discoveries, and changes throughout the research process. All of these methods for collecting data were considered most appropriate for qualitative type studies.

Inductive reasoning and how participants make meaning of their community school experiences were key components in my analysis. As stated earlier, a crucial aspect of the conceptual thinking around this study is that power is a co-constructed reality that shapes and is shaped by those in relation to it (Foucault, 1995). This gives way to an ontological notion that the very nature of reality is a mass of multiple realities that are constructed by those participating in it. Further, I studied what the school community members thought about their power, power flows inside and outside their school, and who holds power in these community school settings based on how they talked about their experiences with the implementation process. Given what I was attempting to describe and the underlying theoretical framework described above, a qualitative research method was best suited for the purposes of this study (Lichtman, 2013).

Further, this study was dependent on the context in terms of time and place. While Pointe and Harrison Elementary were at different stages in their implementation process, they had both

completed and analyzed their asset and needs assessments and were in the midst of building leadership and plans of action based on what the school community had deemed necessary. They had also both created goal teams and restructured the school level decision-making bodies that were integral to community members' relationships to power.

The overall design and process used for this study is considered emergent. This study was not concerned with making generalizations to schools as a whole or even community schools in particular. It sought to understand and describe the social interactions and discourse of a school community as they became a community school. Throughout the research process, I was open to making certain adjustments to questions, forms of data, and participant selections that might need to be made to make the most of what was learned and how that was obtained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Those adjustments are discussed throughout the chapter where most appropriate. This need for flexibility was based on the assumption that there are multiple ways of knowing what is best for school communities and the schools in which they learn and work. I was acutely aware that how that was uncovered could call for changes in the initial research plan.

Lastly, just as with most qualitative studies, this research was an attempt to describe a *holistic account* of how the school communities perceive power, who has it, and how it has changed throughout the implementation process. Holistic accounts are ones that are concerned with developing a complex picture that involves multiple factors and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is as important to understand as student's proficiency scores or graduation rates when talking about a school's effectiveness. Because school communities contain voices that are frequently silenced, it is crucial to "hear" the knowledge and perspectives they bring to better understand how their community school is making power shifts. These holistic accounts about

schools and power structures are something that quantitative studies, statistical analyses, and scientific processes cannot always capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Case study approach.

A case study approach was most appropriate for this exploration due to its propensity for describing a real-life system that is bound by a specific time and place (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013). Both schools were situated in a specific time and place in terms of having been chosen to become community schools and where they were in their implementation process. Having already completed their asset and needs assessment—a research backed, best practice component of community school implementation—they had formed goal teams and decision-making bodies that were comprised of key school community members (CPD, 2016; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; NEA, 2018; NEPC, 2017). Because the units for analysis were two school sites, a multiple case study approach was most appropriate for conducting an in-depth case description to determine prevalent themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). More specifically, this was an *intrinsic case study*. Intrinsic case studies are ones that focus on a case because of its unique situation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Pointe and Harrison Elementary were unique due to the promising initial results they had seen in school community participation both in comparison to the other pilot community schools and to the other public schools in the district.

Setting

There are currently two community school pilots being launched in a small urban district in North Carolina, both of which have been chosen for this study. Pointe Elementary and Harrison Elementary (pseudonyms) were chosen because they had both seen a drastic increase in school community participation in the goal teams and leadership bodies that were created following their school wide asset and needs assessments. These schools all came from the same

district, had staff and administrative teams that were in favor of the community school model, and served primarily Black and Brown students (Farmer Public Schools (pseudonym)², 2019).

Table 3. Membership by Ethnicity (percentages) 2019-2020

| | Harrison Elementary | Pointe Elementary |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| American Indian | 0.2% | 0.5% |
| Asian | 0.5% | 3.1% |
| Hispanic | 38.7% | 50.3% |
| Black | 21.3% | 34.5% |
| White | 34.6% | 8.2% |
| Multi-Racial | 4.6% | 3.4% |
| Total Number of Students | 431 | 388 |

Note. Adapted from “Demographic/Enrollment Numbers” by Farmer Public Schools, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.dpsnc.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=5333&dataid=32011&FileName=Enrollment%2019-20%20for%20website.pdf>

In addition to a similar demographic make-up, the schools had exceeded academic growth expectations according to state standards for the 2018-2019 school year (NCDPI, 2019).

However, the schools differed in terms of state performance grading, proficiency scores, and suspension and expulsion rates. Table 4 shows a breakdown of performance, academic, and suspension data for each school.

Table 4. Case Study Performance Overview 2019-2020

| | Harrison Elementary | Pointe Elementary |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|
| North Carolina School Report Card Grade | C | C |
| Performance Score | 66 | 55 |
| Academic Growth Score | 91.9 (Exceeded) | 89.7 (Exceeded) |
| Reading Proficiency (Grades 3-5) | 50.7% | 31.2% |
| Math Proficiency (Grades 3-5) | 59.5% | 45.4% |
| Science Proficiency (Grades 3-5) | 80.6% | 64.9% |
| English Learner Progress | 73.3% | 59.3% |
| Out of School Suspensions (per 1000 students) | 13.13 | 0.00 |

Note. Adapted from “NC School Report Cards” by North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2019, Retrieved from <https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/src/school?school=320318&year=2019&lng=en>

Both schools were in different places in terms of program maturity. Harrison Elementary started the asset and needs assessment in the spring semester of 2018 and Pointe Elementary started theirs in the fall of 2018. According to those assessments, the schools created goal teams to focus in on the specific work that needed to be done at each school according to what was identified as a school community need. Table 5 shows the goal teams themes by school.

Table 5. Goal Teams by School 2019-2020

| Harrison Elementary | Pointe Elementary |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Parent Engagement | Academic Supports |
| Professional Development | After School Enrichment |
| Student Behavior Supports | Home/Family Support & Communication |
| | Social Emotional Support |

Note. Adapted from “Goal teams: Problem solving with a purpose” by Farmer Public Schools Community Schools Partnership (pseudonym)³, 2019. Retrieved from <https://bccsp.org/?p=655>

Harrison elementary.

Harrison Elementary is a Kindergarten through 5th, centrally located magnet school in the heart of an urban district. Perhaps not reflected in the socioeconomic data of the school, it presents as a fairly middle-class school, and there are families waitlisted for enrollment. The majority of the faculty and staff identify as White. However, there has been an intentional focus on hiring more staff of color since the beginnings of the community school implementation process. One of the instructional leadership teams even consists solely of Black women leaders. Despite the number of Spanish speaking families, the school does not have a full time Spanish speaking parent liaison due to lack of funding from the district for this position. Many of the limited Spanish speaking staff, including their community school coordinator, work to fill this gap to aid with parent communication.

As one of the first community school pilot sites, this school has seen an increase in their parent involvement with the PTA and goal teams, and was chosen to be a part of this study due in part to these engagement gains. All teaching staff serve on one of the three identified goal teams as seen in Table 3. They have also restructured their school wide decision-making bodies

into three teams: school improvement team, instructional leadership team, and community school goal teams. There have also been concerted efforts to restructure their PTA to better include the voices of their Black and Brown parents.

Harrison was chosen to become a community school due in part to staff and administrative buy-in. Prior to the asset and needs assessment process, a vote was held with staff to become a community school. Over 90% of those working in the school agreed to be a part of the pilot. Since becoming a community school, Harrison has initiated several wrap-around services—one of the six defining pillars of community schools—for students and families including an on-site washer and dryer, weekly food pantry, and access to vision and dental services. Between the initiatives and potential for academic and community growth, this school presented as an appropriate case for study.

Pointe elementary.

Pointe Elementary is a pre-k through 5th elementary school located in a newly gentrified area of the city. The school year prior to becoming a community school pilot, the school was scheduled for closure and state take over. Due to an intentional organizing effort by the local teacher's union and school community, Pointe was able to stay open and join the community schools project. Since then, the school has gone from an "F" in the 2015-2016 school year to a "C" in the current school year.

The school has had a change in administration and a massive rehiring effort for teachers and staff as well. While the family and student population have been fairly transient, Pointe Elementary is starting to see their student population stabilize. As more White families move into the surrounding school neighborhood, the demographics are also changing. Currently, the

majority of their student population identifies as Black and Latino. The majority of the teaching staff is White.

Pointe presents as a turnaround model type school or school in transition, and because of this, has had access to an overwhelming number of outside partnerships offering a variety of supports. Like Harrison, they have seen a significant increase in parent engagement since starting the implementation process and had over 90% school staff buy-in when they voted to become a community school.

Pointe Elementary has four goal teams as described in Table 3. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, staff were given the option to participate in a team of their choosing. However, participation in goals teams has remained optional but open. Building off of the community school pillars, Pointe has devoted large amounts of effort and time into building inclusive leadership. They recently restructured their decision-making bodies into their school improvement team and the community school goal teams. Instructional coaches have also played a significant role in serving as and coaching teacher leaders. Due in part to the initial gains they have seen in community engagement and teacher leadership, Pointe Elementary was chosen to be a part of this intrinsic case study.

Sample Selection

Because the research question is concerned with describing how school community members talk about power, it was imperative that the participants have had some experience with the community school implementation process at their school. Whether they were directly involved with the planning and roll out of the program, participated in the asset and needs assessment, or served on a leadership team, they needed to have some knowledge or history with the process itself. For this reason, a *purposive sampling procedure* was most appropriate. As

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) point out, “the logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 148). The participants were selected to provide information that was reflective of their experiences and the community school setting in which they were a part. This required that they were purposefully chosen from the school community.

Maximum variation sampling.

In addition to this using a purposive sampling procedure, I wanted to be sure that the participants offered a variety of perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was not enough to limit the sampling pool to teachers and parents. The focus of the research was partly on the school community itself, so the participants needed to be representative of that community. I wanted to talk to teachers and parents, along with instructional assistants, administrators, community school organizers, instructional resource teachers, parent liaisons, community partners, and the like. Instead of attempting to define each of these roles here, I asked those in the roles themselves to describe exactly what it was they did and how they were connected to the school during the interview process. This type of sampling strategy is called *maximum variation sampling*. Maximum variation sampling is used when a diverse and varied participant pool is needed based on a particular characteristic (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). In this case, there was a need to talk to different school community members because of the particulars of the research question.

Having worked on a team of people throughout the implementation process prior to beginning this research, I have been able to form relationships with the community school organizers and principals at each of the schools selected for this study. Both the principal’s and the community school organizer’s daily interactions with the school community are extensive,

and they offered great insight as to who should be a part of this research. I relied heavily on their recommendations to determine the participant pool.

To attain this sample, I met with both the principal and community school organizers at each school in the early spring of 2020. I described the type of study I was doing and that I wanted to interview a variety of people that had been a part of the implementation process as described above. Each principal and coordinator supplied a list of approximately 15-20 school community members. I reached out to all of the recommendations via email using the email recruitment document found in Appendix A. Although most of the participants responded within a week of receiving the request, a maximum of two follow up emails were sent requesting their participation if no initial agreement was received. Of the 37 total requests made, 15 did not respond and two never returned the consent form, leaving a total of 20 interview participants. Participant race, gender, and title can be found in Table 6. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identity.

Table 6. Participant Demographics and Titles

| Participants | Gender | Race | Title |
|---------------|--------|--------|----------------------------|
| Sarah | Female | White | Classroom Teacher |
| Shelly | Female | White | Specialist |
| Kendra | Female | White | Instructional Coach |
| Laura | Female | White | Instructional Coach |
| Tara | Female | White | Special Education Teacher |
| Ellie | Female | White | Community School Organizer |
| Mr. Jorgenson | Male | Black | Principal |
| Katie | Female | White | Classroom Teacher |
| Josh | Male | White | Local Union President |
| Penny | Female | White | Parent |
| Joann | Female | White | Parent |
| Janice | Female | Black | Parent |
| Grace | Female | White | Classroom Teacher |
| Marie | Female | Latina | Instructional Coach |
| Ms. Jenkins | Female | White | Principal |
| Nicole | Female | Latina | Community School Organizer |
| Kyle | Male | White | Classroom Teacher |
| Ashley | Female | White | Parent |
| Darla | Female | Black | Parent |
| Allison | Female | Latina | Parent |

Data Collection

After the participants were contacted, I attempted to understand how they discussed power, who had power, and how that had shifted throughout the implementation process. Discourse is not an observable data source, so I collected these narratives and discourses through interviews and elicitation devices. Less concerned with *triangulation*, or attempts to eliminate bias and increase accuracy using multiple data sources, I looked to multiple data sources as a way to offer more opportunities to understand the phenomenon in question from a variety of angles (Lichtman, 2013). However, proving validity was not a driving force in this study. These types of data collection allowed me to describe how the participants were making sense of power and their relationships to it. The very nature of what was being studied embraced objectivity and welcomed the biases and assumptions the participants and researcher brought to the findings.

After participants agreed to be in the study and had signed the consent, they were asked to have a pen and paper ready at the time of the interview for the elicitation activity. Due to the pandemic, only two of the interviews were conducted face to face. The remainder were held over the Zoom application and recorded there for later transcription. The collection particulars for each of the devices used are described further in the sections below.

Interviews.

As with many other qualitative studies, interviews were a major source of data due to their propensity to elicit rich descriptions from the participants about their perceptions and experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Interviews are a basic mode of inquiry, and one of the oldest ways humans have made sense of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). They are also usually the primary way qualitative researchers collect data. As a form of interaction and joint construction between the interviewer and interviewee, they allow the space for a researcher to

become an instrument through which the participant tells their story (Lichtman, 2013).

Interviews are a social interaction where knowledge is constructed through discourse and conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2006). It is important to understand when doing interviews that the researcher is not trying to be objective, but instead, acts as a filter or lens through which the participant's story is being analyzed and understood (Lichtman, 2013).

Through the conversation, the researcher tries to understand the world through the eyes of the participant, give meaning to their perspectives, and describe their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The meaning that people make of their experiences are usually tied to the ways people carry out those experiences (Seidman, 2006). This was especially enlightening when asking participants about their experiences with power, as it shed light on whether or not they eventually enacted their power in some capacity at the school level.

The type of interview I thought would be most appropriate for these research questions was one that would be conducted one-on-one, contextual in nature, and structured as a guided, semi-structured interview. One-on-one interviews are usually conducted between the researcher and interviewee in the same room, and allow the interview to flow much like a natural conversation. They are relational and help to build rapport between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Asking participants to talk about their power or lack thereof was a fairly intimate topic. It required that the interviewee feel comfortable enough to describe situations and experiences that may or may not have come easily. Contextual interviews describe the assumptions being made, the types of knowledge being produced, and the role that the researcher plays. They take into account the context—or place and time—in which the interview is happening (Lichtman, 2013). With this case study, the participants had been involved with a specific event related to their school; the implementation process and community model both

lent themselves to interviews that took into account this context. Lastly, these were guided interviews, or ones that shared a general structure with all of the participants, but also allowed for some variation as appropriate (Lichtman, 2013). All of the school community members I spoke with came to the experience from a variety of perspectives according to how they related to the school. Principals spoke of their experiences in ways very different from parents, classroom teachers, and instructional coaches. Guided interviews allowed me to shift some of my language to make it most appropriate for that particular participant.

Using Seidman's (2006) in-depth interviewing structure and sequence, participants were first asked to talk about the context of their experience. I asked them to tell their story about how they came to be at their community school and the roles they had played in the implementation process. I then asked them to offer up details about their experience, and specifically talked about how their participation impacted them and/or their children. Finally, I asked questions about the overall meaning they made from their experience, focusing on what they thought the school needed to continue to hone and where they saw the community school initiative heading into the future.

As I had hoped, these interviews followed a pattern and flow much like that of a conversation. In most cases, this conversational flow created a space where participants felt comfortable enough to discuss the power dynamics at their school and who they believed to be in possession of it. Most of my questions were answered as participants related their stories about how they came to be a part of the community school process. I used the interview protocol in Appendix B as a framework for the conversation, referring back to particular questions that had not been directly or thoroughly answered as needed.

After all of the interviews had been completed, I transcribed the interview data with the Otter.ai transcription software using the mp4 recording formats from the Zoom meeting. Once those transcripts were completed, I then went back through the transcript, listening to the recorded interview and making corrections as needed. Once those corrections were made, I emailed each participant their transcript asking if anything needed to be added or changed. None of the participants offered up any further corrections or additions.

Elicitation devices.

Barton (2015) defines elicitation devices as “a category of research tasks that use visual, verbal, or written stimuli to encourage participants to talk about their ideas” (p. 179). They are especially helpful when one is asking participants to talk about difficult or complex topics. In this case, I wanted power, and the ways in which it was defined per the conceptual framework, to be clearly defined prior to the interview. Bagnoli (2009) has used graphic elicitation devices in her research as a way to give participants an opportunity for a “multiplicity of dimensions” when relating their perceptions and experiences (p. 547). As a qualitative researcher, she believes that not all knowledge is reducible to language alone. In her article she describes using relational maps as a means to understanding children’s understanding of the important relationships in their lives using an elicitation device. She describes having the interviewees create a visual map much like that of the solar system, with themselves in the center, and those most important to them surrounding them like the planets. From these maps, she was able to draw conclusions about to whom the participants were most related.

For the purposes of this study, I used relational maps as a way for understanding how the interviewees saw the power structures at their community school prior to and after the implementation process. The format I used is included in Appendix B, and the titles I asked

participants to address are included in Appendix C. The elicitation device activity began with a discussion with the participant about how power and power relationships were defined in the study. Next, instead of using a solar system like model, the participants were asked draw a representation of power flows using the members of their school community from top to bottom or side to side, however they deemed fit, both before and after the implementation process. I then had the interviewee discuss their drawings and why they had represented the power flows at their schools in the ways that they chose. These discussions were captured in the interview transcripts.

Originally, I had hoped to use a program that would allow the participants to arrange virtual sticky notes with the titles of various school community members in ways to describe these flows. However, this would have required them to begin a 30-day trial and download the software package, a step I felt would deter interviewees from participating. Instead, a screen shot of the stickies was shared with the participants prior to initiating their drawings. What resulted was an assortment of visual depictions that were very revealing of how participants perceived of power and the shifts that occurred during the implementation process. These results are described in detail in the findings and analysis chapter to follow.

Documents.

In my original dissertation proposal, I had intended to include documents from the community school implementation in my data collection. However, considering the current pandemic situation, I reconsidered this due to feasibility. Meeting materials and other resources that would have been available to me in face-to-face situations had become more of an internal distribution. Asking for these to be sent to me despite my participation would have lacked context and put an undue burden on school staff that were already overwhelmed with adjusting to remote learning.

Data Analysis

CDA as a theoretical framework.

The largest portion of data used in this study came from discourse and texts, making it an ideal scenario for *critical discourse analysis*. As stated in the introduction, critical discourse analysis can be used as a theoretical framework and method for investigating relations between social interactions and power structures by homing in on the texts produced in verbal interactions (Lewis, 2006). CDA allows researchers to not only look into deeper explanations about a phenomenon, it also offers ways to recognize and take action with moments of inequity (Gee, 1999). It is concerned with power and how power is manifested and reproduced through language and discourse (Van Dijk, 2007). When using discourse, and language in particular, participants were not only saying things as a way to inform others about their experiences, they were also trying to do and be something. Their discourse also spoke to the bigger Discourse involving power and school wide decision in public schools in general. What they said about their power was key to understanding the actions they took, the possibilities for participation, the role they wished to perform, and what they were able to achieve (Gee, 1999).

CDA is also interested in discovering and bringing to light conditions of inequality, and is fairly dependent on how the analyst defines power and where it is located. Language is entirely political in the ways that it reveals how social goods are distributed. Discourse gets at who has what in terms of class, standing, and power (Gee, 1999). When participants used language to talk about their experiences with becoming a community school—one that was attempting to redistribute power and other social goods—their language was inherently political.

Merging social theory with discourse analysis, allows researchers to uncover moments in text, language, and discourse where facets of the social world are being constructed and/or

reproduced and where they are being redistributed and shifted (Rogers et al., 2005; Gee, 1999). Just as Foucault points out that power is a mutually constructed phenomenon by those in relationship to it, CDA is a mechanism by which these moments can be uncovered, explored, and examined. These moments not only tell how that person perceived the process, but could also be an indicator as to what that participant was capable of doing and being. If community schools are to make a lasting impact on how public schools function, analyzing how school community members talk about their experiences also gives researchers a glimpse of the actions and roles those members were willing to take.

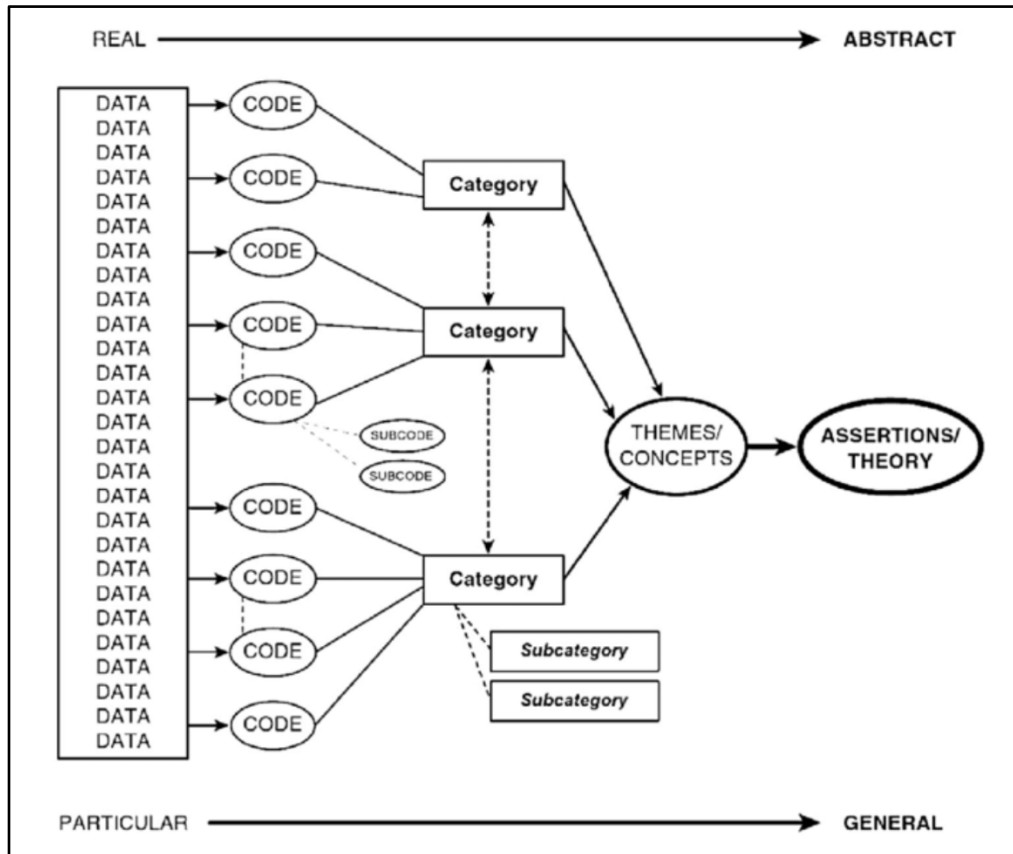
CDA as a methodology.

Using the CDA lens, this study attempted to uncover how participants talked about power, how they described who has power, and whether or not they relayed power shifts that happened as a part of the community school implementation process. Starting with the elicitation devices, participants were given an opportunity to understand how power was being defined as a part of this study. They also had a chance to rank and sort school community members, a process that was recorded and analyzed using CDA methods. Next, interview transcripts were interpreted using a CDA analysis to allow for an in depth dig into the words, phrases, pauses, etc. that occurred when participants talked about their experiences through the context of this community school process. CDA allows researchers to emphasize transcriptions and argues that the initial analysis actually occurs as texts are transcribed (Ochs, 1979). Texts were transcribed as described above and then rearranged—specifically looking at mentions of power and shifts in that power—to allow for multiple opportunities for analysis. Critical discourse analysis lent itself to understanding social processes and changes that happened therein through discourse and texts making it an ideal guiding force throughout the data analysis (Fairclough, 2001).

Qualitative research moves from the specific to the general. Employing this approach, the collected texts were used to make general statements based on these specifics (Lichtman, 2013). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) define coding “as a range of approaches that aid the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of the data” (p. 27). They argue that it is more than just reducing the data to frequencies and common denominators, but instead, it is about expanding and opening up the data to more analytical possibilities. In this way it is a heuristic device that allows for processes of reflection that bring to light what participants mean, both directly and indirectly, when they are talking about power (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Saldaña, 2016). Through these coding devices and the tenets of CDA, power and changes in power structures were uncovered in the discourses and texts associated with the community school implementation process.

Analysis overview.

Through the course of three cycles of analysis, I worked through the data from the interview transcripts to a set of themes that I used to interpret my findings and draw conclusions. Taken from Saldaña (2016), my analysis flowed from the real to the abstract and the particular to a more general understanding of the two community school cases.



Note. Reprinted from *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, by Saldaña, J., 2016, p.14.

First cycle analysis.

During the first cycle coding process, I used both a *structured* and *in vivo* coding procedure to organize the data into major categories and analyze that data to uncover overriding themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) describes structural coding as a process that “applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry” (p. 98). It is most applicable in studies—like this one—with semi-structured data gathering processes that involve looking at specific categories and themes. In the case of this study, because of the wording of my three research questions, I specifically sought out phrases that contained the word power and any of its derivatives (ex. Empowered, powerful, etc.). I also looked at any instances where participants mentioned shifts, changes, and/or transformations. I

arranged these phrases into before and after segments according to the one of the words listed above. Figure 2 shows an example of how this first cycle was arranged.

| Participant | Before | Analysis word | After |
|-------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Ellie | you know I think classroom teachers have some | Power, powerful, empowered | power over IAs and they're working conditions and their daily lives and stuff. |
| | I think this is like the relative | | power that people have in the building and the direction of power that some of them have over each other. |
| | power that people have in the building and the direction of | | power that some of them have over each other. |
| | This was like his (garbled), so he's been in the process of figuring out who is going to have influence over him. Like who does he trust essentially? And so I think this is a very diverse group obviously. And like some people that can sway Jorgenson and other people can't. (gotcha) Based on like who he's decided he trusts. But that's sway over the person who has the actual | | power. It's not power. If that makes sense. |
| | But I have what I would describe as a terrible working relationship with my assistant principal. Or really a non-relationship with her. But there's a real divide--a massive divide at our school--and a | | power struggle going on. |
| | We are in a right to work setting. We're in education. We're in the public sector. Our enemies are in the state legislature for the most part. And we don't... we know there are a lot of shitty principals, but we don't have the | | power or the resources to win fights at the building level. And we really need to win fights at the state level first in my opinion. In that context and having to do this school transformational kind of work, building the level of trust that I have has been completely critical. |

Figure 2. First cycle structural analysis using the word power.

The other first cycle coding process I used was an in vivo procedure. An in vivo² process takes words as they are directly stated in the qualitative data record. These are codes made from the actual words of the participants, and are most applicable to studies that intend to prioritize and highlight what a participant is saying about a particular phenomenon (Saldaña, 2016). Because my main research question sought to look at the specifics of what school community members said about power and my intention to critically analyze that discourse, I found this to be an appropriate coding process. Going through each of the interview transcripts, I pulled out any statements or phrases that pertained to one of the three research questions and/or were reoccurring enough to suggest a shared concept. Figure 3 shows an initial picture of these in vivo codes.

| |
|--|
| Agency/autonomy |
| More vocal |
| Call things out/advocate |
| |
| Not losing teachers/lower turnover |
| |
| goal teams |
| leadership teams |
| PTA |
| school improvement team (SIT)/the room where it happens |
| |
| no matter who is principal (invivo)/all just go away/give up on it/rug pulled out from under us |
| |
| I want them to see me/wasn't going anywhere |
| communal power |
| being a part of something/involved/connected/at the table(invivo)/a little bit of say/being pulled in/participation |

Figure 3. Example of first cycle in vivo coding.

Second cycle analysis.

During the interview process, participants were directly asked to talk about power, how they saw it functioning at their school, and how it had changed since the implementation process. This offered a plethora of statements containing words dealing with power and change. To take a more critical look at those statements and uncover what was also indirectly being said, I did a second round of analysis. First, I went through each of the before and after statements and wrote a statement in my own words about what they were actually saying about power and change in general outside of the context of the question. Table 7 shows some examples of these rewrites.

Table 7. Second Round Analysis with “power” and “change”

| Before | After | What is being said |
|--|---|--|
| And then kind of a little bubble of people with | no power and no seat at the table at the decision making table at all would be IAs. I put a little fruit here for cafeteria workers, bus drivers, custodians, and then also parents. Parents aren't really involved in any decisions. And then our students were feeling the hurt from that our students were kind of the losers in that | IAs, parents, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and students are all considered powerless because they are not participating in the decision making process. Students are hurt by that powerlessness or perceived powerlessness. |
| It's not about me having control over anything. It's about me playing my role as one of the listener and two the | empowerer of distributive leadership. That is everything! | The principal realizes he can share power. He calls himself an "empowerer" because he listens to his staff and builds leaders. |
| And so like, so much of this is about the willingness of the people at the top to let go of some | power and to be vulnerable to change. | Losing power and the ability to control changes can make one feel vulnerable. |
| So I think that leadership [principal] | changes how things are. And changes the whole dynamics of everything. So I think by having her at the helm, saying these things like saying, we need to make sure that our students have the best education possible that we could give them made it easier for the teachers to say, well, these are the things that I | When principals make students a priority, it can empower teachers to honestly ask for the resources they need to fulfill that priority. |
| I think one of the things that helped a lot is the way that the principal communicate to the to her teachers in telling them that every child is important. Every child is important in that communication. I think that | changed everything. | When principals communicate that ALL students are important, it can change how school community members view students. Possibility for equity? |
| I mean Ms. Jenkins is, um, I think, the best example of someone who has softened with the community school model. Um, and I really think that, um, I think she's an excellent facilitator. And she does well with this idea that she is facilitating a collaboration of power. And I like it just is | changed her outlook, I think in a really positive way. | The community school model helped to change the principal's outlook about how to share power and collaborate with staff and that has been a positive shift. |

I then grouped these statements into the following categories: sharing power, representation, race and class, data, continuous improvement science, students, community schools, power outside of the building, power inside of the building, not sharing power, shifting power, influence, relationships. Using these categories I again turned to answering the three original research questions: How do participants talk about power, who has power, and how has power shifted. Those findings will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Using the in vivo quotes, I grouped similar statements to create overarching codes and developed my codebook. I derived at definitions for the codebook using what the participants said directly combined with the implications of those statements. Referring back to the research questions at hand, some of those codes were set aside and the remainder were used to code the interview transcripts. For this analysis, I used NVivo12 qualitative analysis software to highlight any instances of the codes in the interview discourse. Through this coding process I was able to group and regroup codes into a set of categories that pertained to one of the three research

questions. These categories were communal power, agency, decision-making, leadership, representation, teams, community, community school organizer, hierarchy, language barriers, organizing principals, PTAs, race and class, sustainability, and teacher turnover.

Final cycle analysis.

Looking at my findings from the structural and in vivo analysis, I started to see quite a bit of overlap in meaning, and I wanted to find a way to integrate what was similar and pull out anything novel from the two analysis pathways. Again, I returned to the two sets of categories. In comparing them side by side I found quite a bit of alignment aside from a few novel discoveries. Some categories laid atop one another nicely. Some categories became subcategories. Some new categories had to be developed, and some subcategories of one set had to be brought out into the forefront. Some of the categories could be used to answer more than one of the three research questions, while others are very specifically related to just one of the questions. When all was said and done, I was able to derive at a set of themes that begins to answer how school community members talk about power. These themes are highlighted in Table 8.

Table 8. Final Themes

| Theme | Subthemes | Frequency |
|-------------------|--|-----------|
| Power | Flow and stuck | 9 |
| Sharing Power | Decision making, collective, and communal power | 130 |
| Representation | Participation, equity, influence, overrepresentation, underrepresentation, language barriers | 249 |
| Principals | Sharing power and final decision maker | 96 |
| Students | Students and student data | 9 |
| Hierarchy | Top, bottom, and shifted | 102 |
| Shifting Power | Organizing, changes, leadership, and teams | 230 |
| Community Schools | Community schools, relationships, and community school organizer | 147 |

Elicitation drawings.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants to draw a picture of how power flowed at their schools both before and after the community school implementation process. I used this as a way to start the complex conversation surrounding power in general and specifically at their school. Sharing a screen with virtual sticky notes with various school community members, participants drew what they saw as the power structure and flow and later talked through each of their drawings. They were asked to take a picture of those drawings and email them to me following the interview.

Some participants had come to their community school after the implementation process occurred, and only felt comfortable doing an after drawing. Some participants drew one drawing and used symbols such as circles to show the before and after differences. Some participants were unable to share those drawings with me, but were still recorded during the interview process and analyzed according to their narrative statements in the structural and/or in vivo analysis. Of those collected, there were a total of 22 drawings--10 depicting the flow before and 12 after. The majority of the drawings collected came from teachers. Figure 4 shows the percentage of drawings collected by school community member role. All collected before and after drawings were compared and contrasted, revealing some recurring themes about who has power at each of the community schools. Despite the roles each participant served, how they depicted power structures was consistent. From this, I was able to determine three groups that I have labeled *outside governance*, *building level decision-makers*, and the *underrepresented* that will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

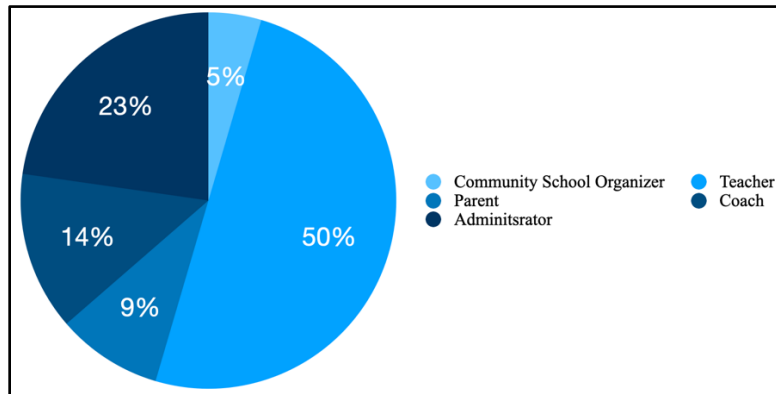


Figure 4. Percentage of drawings by school community member role.

Transferability

Qualitative research is constantly under scrutiny for its ability to be validated and used to make assumptions about other situations outside of the research setting. Because of the type of study that has been chosen for this research, there will not be attempts to make generalizations about community schools as a whole. Instead, I am aiming for *transferability*, or the extent to which the findings can be related to other settings (Lichtman, 2013). As with most qualitative studies in general, it has moved from the concrete to the abstract. I have tried to represent how my findings for these schools can be applied to similar contexts and settings, or to other community schools in similar stages in their development and geographic location (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). Using thick and rich description of these two cases, I make “context-bound extrapolations” where I can speculate on the relatability of my findings to other situations that may be similar, but not necessarily identical (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 47).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

The topic of researcher bias in qualitative research is a volatile one. For many, it is believed that all qualitative researchers need to admit and own their biases in order to better validate their findings. Bias is believed to inhibit impartial judgement, and therefore impact the usability of one’s research findings. Some will argue that it needs to be controlled for using

triangulation techniques, multiple sources, and the like. However, as Lichtman (2013) points out, this type of thinking is “foundationalist, traditional, or postpositivist” in nature, and that striving for objectivity is not as important as many have made it out to be (p. 21). I also embrace this stance, and would argue that it is my relationship to community schools that makes this study possible in the first place and an ideal topic for *my* analysis. Rather than bias, it could be argued that it is, instead, expertise.

That said, I would like to point out that I have been working behind the scenes of the community school pilot project in this district since its inception four years ago. I have facilitated meetings with the lead organizers that worked to garner support with local school boards and county commissions. I have helped develop plans to get this model implemented, and I have worked alongside school community members to conduct an asset and needs assessment. As it stands currently, I continue to serve on teams that work to keep community schools up, running, and moving forward. While the data that has been collected during this time will not be used as a part of my overall analysis, I do admit that these experiences could be considered biases and assumptions by some. However, as pointed out earlier, I think this actually works in favor of the study, and I am confident that these experiences have done nothing but validate and strengthen my findings in the end.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The structural, in vivo, and elicitation drawings analyses each yielded some general findings that tended to address all three research questions in some capacity. However, there were also some very specific findings according to the type of analysis itself. The structural analysis tended to directly address all of the research questions. The in vivo analysis shed light on more nuanced and specific ways power functioned at the schools. The elicitation drawings very specifically addressed the question of who has power both before and after the implementation process.

As a part of my data analysis described in chapter three, I was able to merge the categories I derived from the first two cycles of analyses into a final set of themes as seen in Table 6. A few things should be noted about these themes. For one, like all qualitative research studies, these themes are in no way completely “final”. In fact, many of the subthemes noted overlapped into more than one theme and could arguably answer more than one of the three research questions. To account for this, I continued to refer back to my three main research questions to decide how to group those subthemes and interpret my findings in the ways that *best* answered those questions. It would be entirely possible to reconfigure these themes given a slightly different inquiry.

It is also important to note that I analyzed the elicitation drawings separately. CDA focuses on relations between social interactions and power structures, and I felt that this visual data offered a unique glimpse into the power flows and interactions at the participant’s school. As visual data unto itself, it merited its own consideration and analysis separate from the

interview discourse. The other reason I analyzed them separately was because the participants discussed their drawings in the interview transcripts, and that data was included in the structural and in vivo analyses. What participants shared about the power flows at their schools was captured both visually through the drawing analysis and verbally through the structural and in vivo analyses.

Lastly, it should be reiterated that these findings are in no way being used to make generalizations about community schools. These are intended only to describe the two cases in question. As I pointed out earlier, qualitative research is messy, and while I cannot compensate for that entirely, I have tried to embrace it and acknowledge the ways I accounted for it in my discussion.

In the following sections, I have divided my findings into two parts. The first concerns the structural and in vivo analyses and the eight themes I arrived at through three cycles of coding and evaluation. The second details my findings of the elicitation drawings and what they said about power. As a CDA analysis, I used these findings to compile the lowercase discourse, or what participants actually said in their narratives. After a discussion of those findings, I have structured my interpretation in terms of the three research questions and have accounted for all of the interview and elicitation drawing analysis therein. It is here that I compare the actual discourse of the participants to the ideologies or larger Discourse surrounding schools. I will define those Discourses in more detail in that section.

Findings

Structural and in vivo analyses.

Shared power.

The majority of the participants described in some detail how power was currently being shared at their school. It was clear that the community school implementation had led to some rethinking about decision-making processes, and this had led in turn to the sharing of this decision-making power in some form or fashion. *Sharing power* was all about grass-tops leaders and power holders giving other school community opportunities to access to their power sources. When school community members were allowed to participate in discussions about school wide issues, vote for a particular curriculum, or weigh in on how funds should be used, they felt like school leaders had shared their power. Power could be had by all when school community members were working together for a shared purpose such as democratic decision-making, and this was made possible when principals stopped making decisions solely. It was clear that school community members valued being a part of the decision-making process and found it to be a way they could all potentially access power.

Shared power was also described as a collective, which was described as power in numbers and power that existed communally. Teachers were especially impacted by this communal power, and many described being included in decision-making processes that had traditionally being accessed only by administration. While it is important to note that those interviewed did see the principal as the final decision maker despite these changes, it was clear that the purposeful sharing of power by these principals was seen as an integral part of inclusive decision-making. Most participants also saw this as a major shift in power that was largely due to the community school implementation.

Power.

Although participants mostly talked about power in terms of shared decision-making at the school level, there were also some participants that discussed power in more abstract ways. These interviewees usually had some connection to their local teachers' union, and/or had prior experience with organizing tactics. When these participants talked about *power*, they described it as a force of some kind that followed patterns in terms of its general behavior. Much like Foucault, they saw power as either flowing in capillary-like ways from one group or context to another or stuck in place. Most of this had to do with whether or not those considered to be in power were willing to share it or not, and participants identified some of the mechanisms by which school community members allowed power to flow or maintained it in its current state. When principals invited teachers to weigh in on funding decisions or make a case for a particular curriculum, participants saw that active relation to their power as a means of allowing power to flow back and forth between all of those most impacted by that power. When power was flowing and being shared, it was considered more dynamic than when one person wielded it alone. This also meant that different people and groups had varying amounts of power according to the context and scenario.

Power was also capable of not flowing or becoming stuck. Participants saw power becoming stuck when decision-making processes that impacted the entire school community were not inclusive or hidden from view. This was done intentionally at times to keep power in spaces where it had always resided. When administrators used their influence and relationships to keep the decision-making process status quo, they were attempting to maintain power as it was. When teachers punished students to keep control over the classroom, they were also holding power in very typical ways. Some considered the sharing of power as a loss of power, which

tended to make those in relation to the power feel vulnerable and a loss of control. Power could also become stuck when school workers looked to supervisors to solve employment issues rather than problem solving themselves. However, this notion of power becoming stuck could be mitigated through the sharing of power.

Representation.

Another major finding had to do with representation and what it did to power, who has power, and how power has shifted at both of the community schools. *Representation* was described as the ability to participate in decision-making processes so that one has a context in which they can relate to their power. Many specifically referred to representation as the capability of using one's voice and influence to impact school wide decisions. Participants frequently verbalized having a seat at the prospective table as a means of impacting what happened at their school. Others also talked about representation in terms of democratic processes. When teachers polled their colleagues about taking on a new school wide behavior system, their ability to vote on a practice was seen as representative of the school staff.

Representation was also about race, class, and equity. Participants talked about how White, affluent parents were frequently over represented in decision-making spaces, and they described how those parents' demands were consistently being heard. Meanwhile, Black, Brown, and poor families were described as underrepresented in the school community both in terms of decision-making spaces and in the staff demographics. While parents of color actually do have the same rights to talk to teachers and principals, they do not feel encouraged to and are therefore less empowered to advocate for themselves and their child. Although most of the interviewees talked about community school practices as a means of combatting this underrepresentation and inequity, it was a widely held belief that their school had not yet arrived at this stage. However,

intentional efforts to hire more teachers and staff of color and the rethinking of who holds leadership positions on work teams had started to shift representation.

Adding to this inequity were the mentions of communication difficulties for non-English speaking school community members. One of the largest, yet least represented groups in the school community were Latinx families because of these language barriers. This was largely due to the lack of bilingual school staff and the schools' limited access to translation and interpretation services. One parent described continually showing up to decision-making spaces wholly unaware of what was being said, but persisted until monies were set aside for translators. This had also been the case with school board meetings, which now had translators at each of the sessions because Latinx families kept requesting those services. Both school communities mentioned these language barriers, and saw how their community school organizers were frequently being pulled from their already overflowing to do lists to act and translators and interpreters. Even those English-speaking-only participants pointed to a need for more Spanish speakers to help parents communicate with their child's teacher and other school staff.

Principals.

The theme of principals was a tricky one. It fit into several other themes and seemed to pervade every aspect of power that I was studying. However, everyone I talked to made mention of their principal, and the part their administrators played in the community school implementation, making it necessary to consider principals as a theme unto itself. *Principals* were the primary administrator at the school and were considered separately from the assistant principal. They were mostly discussed in one of three ways. One of the ways was that principals were the most powerful member at the school level both before and after implementation. While both principals were willing to share their power with their staff, school community members

consistently pointed out that the final say still came down to their principal. Principals continued to be the ones held accountable to the school district, superintendent, and other governing bodies. They had to answer for any school wide decisions no matter how they were decided. This put principals at the top of the building level power hierarchy regardless of the power shifts both schools had experienced.

Another way principals were discussed was how they were sharing their power. As discussed above, the phenomenon of sharing power was mostly due to the principal. Each principal described in detail having to undergo a process of transformation where they learned to let go and let others in the school lead. Neither of them had come into the implementation process with a sharing mindset. Through ongoing conversations and coaching with their community school organizer, they both slowly began to share more power with their school staff. It was not an overnight process, and both principals related stories about the internal and external obstacles they had to overcome to learn how to share in the decision-making power. Other school staff also noted this change in their leadership, and many related feelings of endearment and respect due to this willingness to change. One principal eventually saw himself as an “empowerer” because of his propensity to listen to his staff and give them opportunities for leadership. The other principal was called a “facilitator of communal power” because of the ways she shared her decision-making power with parents and staff. This sharing of power was an absolutely critical part of the community school implementation process. Time and again participants related that had those principals not been on board, the community school implementation would have never happened. This also made many participants wary of how sustainable the community school model would be should there ever be a change in school leadership.

Participants also talked about their assistant principals. Both assistant principals did not appear to be as bought into the community school model as the principal was. One assistant principal appeared to some to be actively working against it, trying to reinstate more top-down decision-making processes that had been previously practiced. The other was quoted as saying that the current implementation process did not resemble what he had been told it would be. Some of the participants related having strained relationships with their assistant principals because of their resistance to this school wide change. Prior to community school implementation, both assistant principals had been key decision-makers at the school alongside the principal.

Hierarchy.

Participants were very clear about the existing school power hierarchy. The *hierarchy* was defined as the way school community members were ranked in terms of power from those with the most to those with the least. Aside from a few overlaps—that I will discuss in my elicitation device findings—there was almost a consensus about where school community members ranked in this hierarchy. What’s more, not much had significantly shifted since the community school implementation. Aside from the shared power that was happening in school wide decision-making, participants were very clear about who was on top and who was on bottom in terms of the power flow. The school board, county commission, and superintendent were on the top of this hierarchy, and participants were sure to point out that nothing had changed about this power structure since the community school implementation. Principals were next in line at the top of the school building hierarchy, but they still answered to these grass-tops entities.

Some school community members clearly had power over others inside of the school building. Assistant principals, instructional coaches, and the community school organizer were next in line to the top, followed by certified school staff (i.e. teachers and specialists). At the very bottom were mostly hourly, classified staff—custodians, cafeteria workers, instructional assistants, and bus drivers—with very little, if no, say in school wide decision-making processes. Interestingly enough interviewees were not consistent about where parents fell in this hierarchy, an issue I will discuss further in the elicitation drawings and interpretations section.

Participants also noted that there was a building level shift in this hierarchy currently underway due to the community school implementation process. Teachers and specialists were recognizably moving up in terms of how they were more able to participate in decision-making and weigh in on how their school was being run. They also had more opportunities to interact with and possibly influence their principal's thinking due to the proximity the newly formed teams afforded. Participation at the school improvement team meetings exposed those people more so to the other leaders in the school building. While I found it important to note that shift here, it will be discussed at length in the shifting power section.

Students.

One of the most surprising findings involved students. *Students* referred to the young people attending and receiving instruction at the schools. There were only nine mentions of students in the entirety of the interview transcript data. Most interviewees did not mention students at all. When they did show up in the transcripts, they were usually identified as the least powerful in the school community. Although some made mention of how the school's decision-making processes held the students' needs at the center, it was unclear if the participants meant

the students as people or the students in terms of their achievement scores. Many times when students were discussed, participants conflated students with student data.

Shifting power.

Both schools underwent a shift in power from the principal and administrative team to the school community. *Shifting power* meant that decisions that had once been solely made by administration were now being shared with parents and school staff. A critical part of this shift came about due to the organizing strategies community school organizers and local union members used to make change. Participants talked about doing a power structure analysis, or PSA. PSAs are used in most organizing campaigns to better understand who has power in a given community, how that power is determined, and who their allies and opponents are (McAlevey & Ostertag, 2012). Also called *mapping the building* when used at the school level, participants ranked their colleagues in order to better see who had leadership capabilities, influence on their peers, and positive political outlooks that aligned with the tenets of community schools. Decision-making processes were also made more inclusive and transparent so that school community members in and out of the building could see for themselves how important choices were being made. In addition, schools began organizing their parents by identifying new parent leaders for their parent teacher association, or PTA, that were more representative of the school community. They invited parent leaders to attend school meetings and become a bigger part of the school wide decision-making process.

For the principals involved, a big part of learning to shift and share power involved looking into existing leadership practices for aspects that could be changed. It became clear early on that this was an essential component to making the community school model work. Most of this was done through a whole scale re-imagining of school wide decision-making processes to

make them more inclusive and representative of the school community itself. Principals worked with their community school organizers and local union leaders to think through perspective changes. In order to make democratic decision-making a lived reality, there needed to be additional structures added to make this successful. That meant that principals would have to shift power from themselves to these structures to include others to make this implementation successful. Both schools had created work teams that centered on making change in areas of need that were identified through the asset and needs assessment data. In addition, they were very intentional about who they asked to lead these teams. Many teachers that had been chosen as these new leaders were quick to add that leadership had not been something they had previously sought out. They also opened up their school improvement team meetings to anyone who wanted to participate. While these meetings were being held at times that precluded the participation of some school community members, both of the schools were very transparent about when meetings were held and what would be discussed. They encouraged any who were interested to attend.

School based teams.

There were at least three school-based teams that school community members could join: the school improvement team, goal teams, and instructional leadership teams. Participants saw these teams as influential bodies that gave them access to their power. The school improvement team, or SIT, had become the main decision-making body at both schools. What was once a space more about filling in district forms and entirely led by administration, had become a democratic space for school wide decision-making. SIT teams were almost entirely staff run since the community school implementation. Parents and staff could come to SIT meetings to weigh in on discussions about curriculum, funding, and other school wide concerns. Even if

school community members did not take on leadership roles on SIT, they were given other opportunities to be a part of voting processes, advocate for a particular issue, or use these spaces to learn what was currently happening at their school. Participants saw these changes as a major shift in power from the principal to the school community.

Goal teams were directly tied to the results of the asset and needs assessments each school had completed in years prior. Table 3 shows each school's goal teams. These teams primarily focused on ways to address the needs and harness the assets described in the data, and they were staff led and run. Using organizing techniques such as mapping the building, targeted school staff were chosen and encouraged to lead these teams. Goals teams were given time and space at SIT to discuss their findings and progress. Although both schools had initially required all staff to choose a team to which they would be a part, one school had later decided to make these teams optional to attract school staff that were particularly passionate about that goal team's focus. Smaller teams tended to be more productive in terms of what they were able to accomplish. These teams also proved highly adaptable when the schools were asked to transition to remote learning due to COVID-19. During this shift, goal teams created communication trees, fundraised for their families, set up food banks, and created online learning curriculum for teachers.

Instructional leadership teams were yet another way the community schools had shifted power. These teams were made up solely of school staff, and were also connected to the school improvement team. Their focus was primarily on academics and ensuring quality instruction at their schools. One school had been very intentional to include every teacher in these teams in some capacity according to their strengths and expertise. The other had managed to cultivate an

instructional leadership team made up entirely of Black women. Both used these teams as a means for building teacher leadership skills.

Most of the participants I talked to found the shifting of power to be rather noticeable. Most identified at least one way they could participate in school wide decision-making. As was noted in the discussion of hierarchy, teachers appeared to be feeling these shifts more readily than any other school community member group. Participants noted that many of the newly assigned team leads had not served in that capacity prior to the community school implementation. Teachers were enjoying a new sense of representation and influence over school wide decision-making, and it was impacting turn over. Both schools had experienced a substantial halt in their turnover and absenteeism, and teachers voiced a renewed sense of enthusiasm for coming into work. Participants also wanted to see these shifts continue to be more inclusive of parents and families in years to come.

Community schools.

Although the community school implementation was the impetus for this study and an integral part of the findings already discussed, there were a few notable findings about the components of a community school model that were connected to power, who had it, and how it had been shifted. One was the role that the community school organizers played in the implementation process and beyond. As one of the four main mechanisms of NEA's community school model, it was already widely known that community schools needed a CSO in order to function. However, this study also proved that these organizers were a critical part of shifting power. In addition to running the ANA and working to create partnerships in the community at large—some of the main duties of a community school organizer—they helped to shift power in more nuanced ways. They coached their principals through the sharing of their power. They

helped school staff think through who should serve as team leads. As these new teacher leaders began facilitating their meetings, CSOs helped them think through agenda creation and whether or not to engage in deeper data collection for new proposals. They also lead the work of wrap around services at their school, helping to coordinate dental and vision services for students and their families and work through tensions associated with running their food bank. Both bilingual, they were constantly called upon to fill in as interpreters and translators in an attempt to mitigate language barriers and ensure their Latinx families were represented. Next to the principal, these CSOs were the most frequently mentioned school community members. It was clear that many of the power shifts were due in part to them, and that the community school model was responsible for their addition to school staff.

Another aspect unique to community schools that participants talked about was the data gathering and continuous improvement science, or CIS, that community school organizers were learning to use as a way of guiding and facilitating sustainable changes. Most of the gathered data came from the asset and needs assessments both schools did in years prior to prepare for the implementation process. CIS was a particular strategy NEA introduced to help schools locally problem solve using a plan, do, study, and act--or PDSA--cycle. Participants found that any data they themselves had gathered throughout the year as a part of the community school model more reassuring when applied to school wide decision-making. The data was a powerful in that it grounded decision-making in the school community's experience and made participants feel more reassured about their actions. When teams hit road blocks, school community members frequently referred back to their data sources to help guide them. This made them feel like they were making changes based off of more solid evidence.

There was also another finding that involved community schools that seemed important to note. A handful of participants expressed some lingering confusion about community schools themselves, and they felt there were others that were grappling with what it really meant to be a community school. One participant lamented about how little she still understood about the concept of community schools and how what they were doing in decision-making spaces related to the implementation. Another participant worried about how clear the model would be for those less involved in teams. The newly founded leadership structures provided chances for everyone to access their power, but how effective could they be if families and staff were not present or represented in some capacity? There were also concerns about making sure new families and staff understood what it meant to be a part of a community school and the types of services, program, and chances for leadership it offered. Currently, neither school had a definitive way of grandfathering newcomers into the implementation process.

Elicitation drawings.

The elicitation drawing data supported most of the themes and findings already discussed. However, because participants were asked to visually depict power flows before and after the implementation, the elicitation drawings were almost entirely concerned with the second research question asking who has power at the two community schools. All of the 22 available drawings were compared and contrasted, revealing some recurring themes. For one, participants based their depiction of a power flow on how connected certain school community member groups were to school wide decision-making. Before drawings tended to look very similar across interviewees in terms of their depiction of a top-down power flow. Governance was always listed at the top, while classified school staff were mostly shown at the bottom.

After drawings tended to look more inclusive. Eight of the drawings used a circle or line to show how new voices inside the school community were being included in the inner circle of their power flow. Participants also described this grouping or circle as the main decision-making body in the school since the community school implementation. Ten of the after drawings used arrows and lines to show both connections and back and forth communication. Despite this inclusive imagery, closer analysis revealed a lingering, very traditional-looking hierarchy. Figure 5 shows two example drawings used in the study.

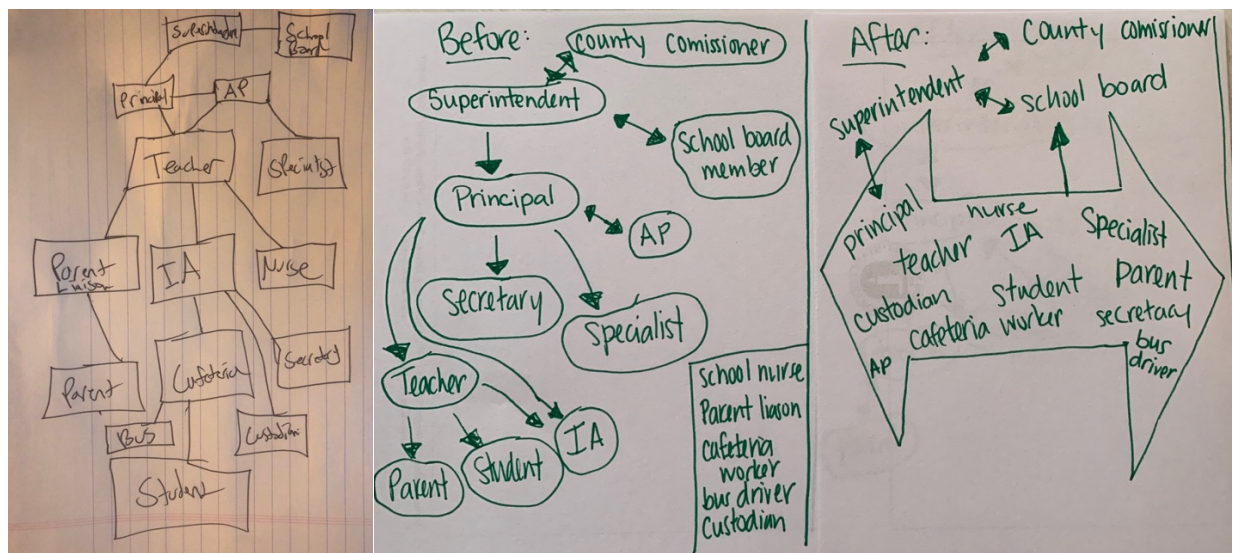


Figure 5. Two elicitation drawings used in the study.

All of the drawings tended to group the school community members into three groups I have labeled: Outside governance, building level decision makers, and those underrepresented. *Outside governance* referred to those school community members that worked outside the school building and were involved in decision-making in some governmental capacity--such as the school board. This also included the county superintendent. The *building level decision makers* were the school community members that were included in the decision-making processes at the school level. The *underrepresented* were those school community members that were connected

to the school, but had little to no say in school wide decision-making processes. Figure 6 shows who was in each of these groups according to the elicitation drawings.

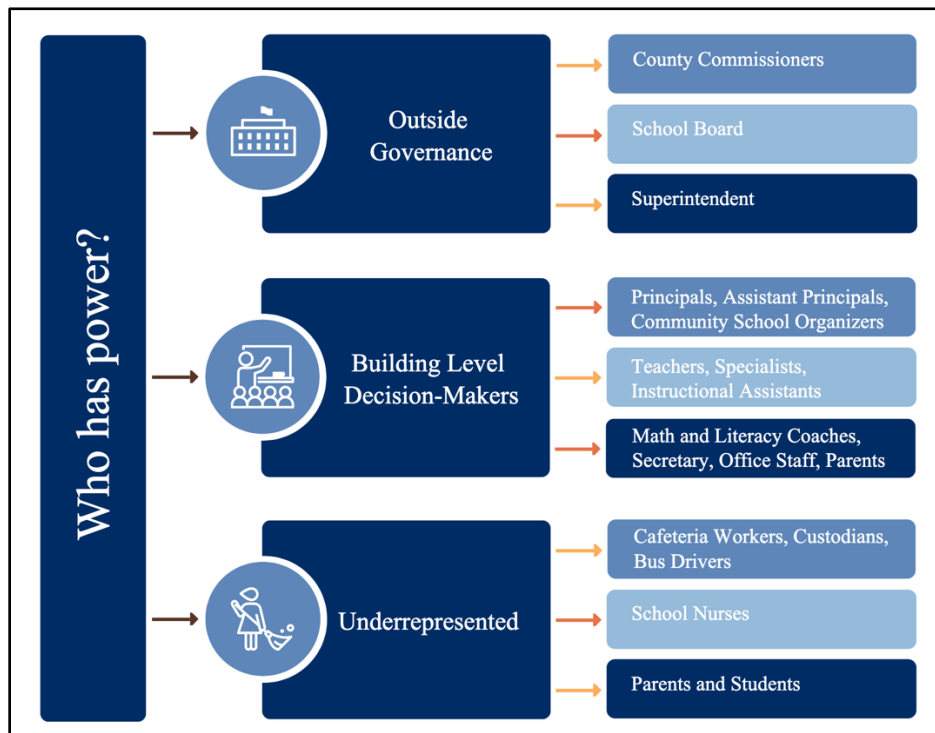


Figure 6. Shows who has power according to the elicitation device drawings.

It should also be noted that some of the roles were consistently drawn as a part of the building level decision-makers, such as the community school organizers, principals, assistant principals, teachers, specialists, and the like. Others--like students, parents, instructional assistants, and school nurses--were drawn in different areas, but tended to show up in one area more so than others. Figure 7 shows this variation. Findings for the elicitation drawings will be described according to each of these groups.

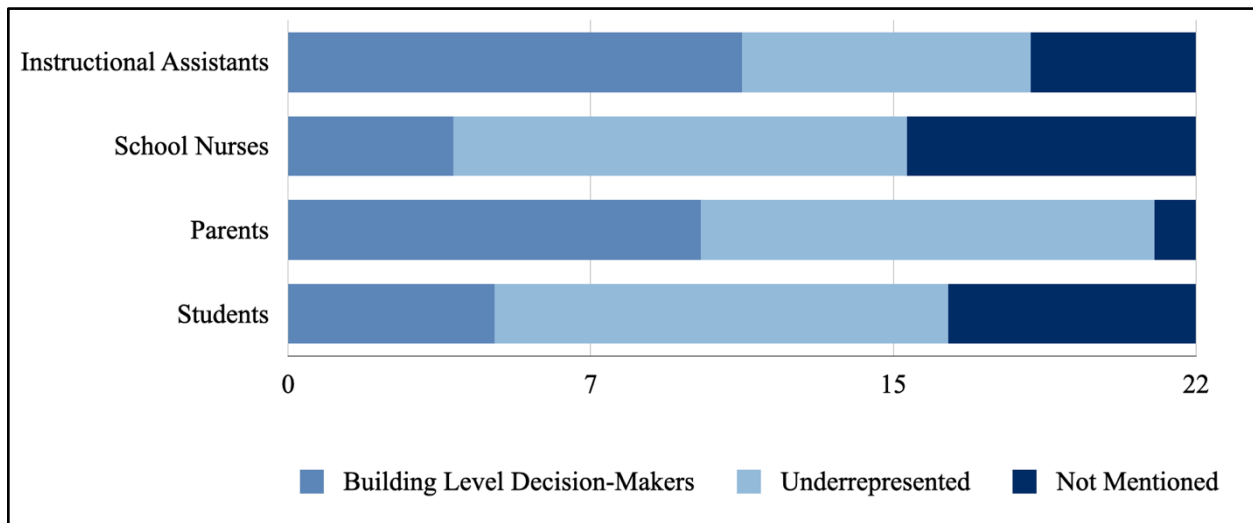


Figure 7. Shows school community members depicted in more than one group.

Underrepresented.

Custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria staff were consistently in the underrepresented group, even when they were depicted as being included in the decision-making group in five of the 12 after drawings. Instructional assistants, students, school nurses, and parents were sometimes included in this group as well. Parents, even when included in the after drawings as a part of the decision-making body, all showed up on the side as if outside the school sphere or at the bottom alongside custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers. Although most of the drawings came from school staff participants, this placement was similar across all drawings. Students were all over the place. Most of the drawings included them either at or near the bottom, but some had them off to the side perhaps as an afterthought or last addition. Six of the drawings did not include them at all.

Building level decision makers.

Administration was clearly the most powerful at the building level. In the drawings, principals were situated at the center near the top. Even in some of the after drawings where school staff were drawn together to represent the whole group making decisions together,

principals were the first ones listed on the left indicating that they were likely written first. While they were listed below outside governance when those school community members were included, principals were always drawn at the top when describing the power flow inside the school building. They also had the most connections with other school community members when drawings included arrows and lines to show the flow of power. Assistant principals were included in every drawing, both before and after. They were always immediately following to the right or just below the principal depending on how the participant depicted the power flow. They were also always immediately preceding teachers.

When it came to teachers, they were generally listed after administration and above instructional assistants, students, and other support staff. When participants drew lines or arrows connecting school community members, they tended to draw multiple connections going from teacher to others inside and outside of the school building much like that seen with principals.

Unfortunately, the community school organizer was not one of the stickies used in the final screen share included in the interviews, which was pointed out to me about halfway through my data collection process. Although I did verbally mention them in the elicitation device instructions that occurred thereafter, they were only included in five of the drawings. All of these were after drawings. Four of them depicted the CSO alongside the administration team to the right or left, and one of them showed the CSO just below the principal. Fortunately, the CSO was frequently mentioned in each of the participant interviews, and more in-depth analysis was done in the in vivo analysis.

Outside governance.

As was noted in the hierarchy theme, not much had shifted with the school community members in this group. Those that were traditionally considered grass-tops stayed at the top. In

both the before and after pictures, school boards, county commissioners, and superintendents were always depicted at the top of the power flow. Nine of those drawings also showed them to the top and left, as if to separate them from the groupings they drew that included the majority of school staff. Much like that seen in the interview data analysis, these grass-tops school community members continued to be on top. The community school implementation had not impacted their power in substantive ways.

Interpretation of Findings

Critical discourse analysis compares the discourse with the Discourse (Gee, 1999). In other words, it looks at a participant's discourse to uncover some of the assumptions, undergirding principles, or contradictions associated with the larger Discourse. What people talk about in their everyday narratives are steeped in givens and assumptions about the context in which they are situated (Gee, 1999; Rogers et al., 2005). In the case of this study, I used the interviews I conducted with participants to analyze their discourse about power and changes in power in a community school implementation to try and uncover what they are simultaneously revealing about the larger Discourse about power and community schools. The larger Discourse not only shapes and forms one's discourse, but it also shapes the thinking of the individual living inside of that Discourse (Caldwell, 2007). Much like power, it is mutually constructive. Discourse informs the individual, and the individual informs the Discourse (Gee, 1999; Foucault, 1990; Lewis, 2006). In other words, how participants talk about power and community schools reveals a larger set of ideas and shapes that larger set of ideas almost simultaneously. Discussions involving power and CDA reveal that nothing is mutually exclusive. All phenomena shape and are shaped by their contexts (Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1995). If one hopes to make changes in schools and open decision-making up to a more democratic process, discourse about

those changes is essential for shaping and shifting the Discourse about school wide decision-making.

After analyzing the interview and elicitation drawing data and stating the findings, I went back to my three research questions to interpret those findings and uncover the larger Discourse about power and community schools. During this process, I looked for ways to consolidate what was being said in each analysis to answer what I had originally asked and determine the conclusions and/or implications of this study. In addition to answering these questions, the findings also revealed a set of larger Discourses around powerlessness, student-centeredness, accountability, white supremacy, structural racism, hegemony, and engagement. Based on my literature review and experience as a classroom teacher, I have defined and discussed those larger Discourses further in the sections below.

How do participants talk about power?

When I embarked on this study, I was using a Foucauldian-inspired way of looking at power. I defined power in the following ways:

- Power defines and is defined by societies (Foucault, 1980).
- Power is reflective of those in relation to it (Foucault, 1980).
- Power can be shifted from one group to another (Foucault, 1990).
- Power shifts can be uncovered through discourse (Gee, 1999).
- Power is everywhere (Foucault, 1980).

The majority of my findings from the interview discourses were in agreement with the first four tenets of this definition in some capacity. Participants talked about those in relation to power and how they had the potential to define and shift it (Foucault, 1980). While I touched on decision-making as a possible relationship to power in the beginning, findings showed that this was

primarily how power was defined in the case of the two community schools. Power was described as influence over what teachers taught, how the school dealt with student behavior in positive ways, and how the school community decided on services for families. Through decision-making processes and democratic participation in their school's leadership teams and bodies, school community members related to and defined their power. Although participants considered traditional grass-tops leaders as the most powerful in regards to their school's decision-making, this was beginning to shift in terms of how principals shared power with staff. Some building level staff felt they were beginning to have more access to these processes, thereby shifting power from one group to another. Being actively represented on SIT, goal, and instructional leadership teams was a burgeoning way participants were actively shifting power. This was a welcomed shift, and most attributed this change to the community school implementation. These types of assumptions and held beliefs involving power were uncovered through verbal and visual discourses about power structures at their schools.

Discourse of powerlessness.

"I guess it's more like a food chain, food web sort of situation, um, to represent power. And I drew like the school board, county commissioners, General Assembly, the {garbled} and other central offices in their own corner with some money. Doesn't mean they don't control things other things besides that but they control money and that controls everything else." – Tara

These discourses also revealed a larger Discourse that participants did not necessarily consider power as a force that was everywhere. Interestingly enough, in their minds, power was still held by a few. They saw it primarily housed in traditional grass-tops hands, and that it was up to these leaders to share power with the school community in order for power flows to shift. Majority of participants did not see power as something they already had. It had to be given over

to them before they could establish a relation to it. Shifts were not made until this transfer of power from the top-down had happened. I named this the *Discourse of powerlessness*. This Discourse says that power is naturally housed in governance structures, and that everyday school community members are normally powerless unless deemed otherwise by these governance structures.

The majority of the participants showed evidence of an internalized Discourse of powerlessness. Unlike Foucault's (1990) notion that governance power is simply a temporary manifestation of power, participants discussed the grass-tops as powerful and normalized the powerlessness felt by those on the bottom. Some of the more organizing savvy participants talked about power becoming stuck and how school community members needed to work together collectively to regain access to the power that was always theirs in the first place. However, this was not the majority held perception. Power was traditionally held by a few leaders at the top, and that was just the way it was. When participants talked about the people in the underrepresented group and their lack of participation in decision-making teams, most participants spoke as if this was the norm. The powerfulness at the top and powerlessness at the bottom of the school hierarchy had become a Discourse of powerlessness.

This is particularly problematic because of the ways it maintains the status quo. When some school leaders are not on board with flowing, relational power, they can easily engage in behaviors that made it difficult to shift. Power can become stuck in these temporary manifestations, and the Discourse of powerlessness is reinforced. When power becomes stuck and fewer people are in relation to it, decision-making processes can suffer in myopic ways because of the lack of variety in perspective. Power and decision-making represent the needs of those least connected to and impacted by the school's practices. School community members can

also contribute to this lack of flow when they embrace the Discourse of their powerlessness, disconnect from their power, and leave decision-making processes to top-down officials without advocating for their needs. As one CSO pointed out, school staff undermine their power when they ask top-down officials to solve their problems, rather than working through them autonomously.

When one principal continued to challenge top-down, district level decisions about the curriculum, they were advised to desist during their annual evaluation. Punishment or fear of punishment contributes to the lack of power flow when it is used as a means to maintain or stick power with one group over another. Maintaining power at the top merely adds to the strength of the Discourse of powerlessness. It creates a perception of control and order, and inhibits changes that could likely benefit the many. This makes it exceptionally difficult to change the Discourse and initiate power shifts. Even during times of change, systems remain static because of how easy it is for those with power to challenge the lesser powerful one's ideas and autonomy.

When participants embrace the Discourse of powerlessness, it makes it difficult to see the underlying mechanisms that contribute to this stagnation. Without a critical eye, these types of sticking measures will rarely be questioned and allowed to continue. This is especially alarming when one considers the implications of what prolonged powerlessness can do to school community members. Having feelings of no power or powerlessness can readily lead to feelings of detachment and apathy, where fewer relationships are being formed or cultivated. Even fewer relationships could mean even less power. It becomes a self-fulfilling cycle. Each direction power takes—from powerful to powerless--is mutually constituting. The more school communities embrace their powerlessness, the more likely they make it true. This could account for why so many of these school community building efforts eventually fade out, especially

when there are forces deliberately blocking change. On the other hand, one feels empowered when they have some modicum of control over the factors that impact their daily lives. They can use this new discourse to challenge Discourses of normalized powerlessness. Having some feeling of power is likely to encourage relationships to and with the things that get one to this feeling of empowerment. Shifting power is critical.

Who has power?

One of the most consistent findings I encountered in this study involved who has power. According to the discourses from both the interview data and elicitation drawings, the power structures and flows remained very much the same as they were prior to the community school implementation. Reflecting the widely held larger Discourse of powerlessness, grass-tops outside governance remained the most powerful, while hourly school staff and students had the very least say. Principals were beginning to share their power with school staff, particularly with teachers. However, they still had the final call when it came to school-wide decision-making.

In answering the question of who has power, I also encountered other larger Discourses in addition to powerlessness. Based on what participants said about those in power and those less connected to decision-making teams and spaces, it was clear that they were working under a set of assumptions or undergirding Discourses about power in schools. Critical discourse analysis helps one understand what is being said both directly and indirectly (Gee, 1999). By analyzing my participants' discourse, I discovered evidence of the Discourses of student-centeredness, accountability, white supremacy, structural racism, hegemony, and engagement.

Discourse of student-centeredness.

“Then students at the very bottom. So I feel like ranked from top to bottom that would kind of be like, most powerful to least powerful in the organization.” – Kyle

Students were in the most contradictory position in the school community hierarchy. Findings showed a contradiction between the ideological Discourse surrounding the importance of students and the actual discourses where participants talked about students. There appeared to be a *Discourse of student-centeredness* where students were heralded as being at the center of everything schools do. This Discourse is the widely held notion that when schools implement programs, do assessments, choose curriculum, and design instruction with students in mind, they stand to make better decisions in general. It is believed that schools that hold students at the center of everything they do are just better schools overall. However, actual discourse about students in this study contradicted the Discourse of student-centeredness. Lowercase discourses revealed students were relatively powerless. Students were rarely mentioned when participants talked about power shifts and the community school implementation. Even in the elicitation drawings—when included—students were either drawn at the bottom or added as an afterthought.

Part of this contradiction could be due to developmental appropriateness or the notion that adults in schools know what's best for students. Students hold no real decision-making power, but their outcomes are said to be the impetus of schoolwide decision-making. Although the asset and needs assessments each school conducted included students' voices, they were still being represented by their adult counterparts in all of the decision-making teams. This could be explained by the developmental appropriateness of their active participation. While schools functioned in order to serve students, left to their own devices, students could choose to make schools primarily about extended recess and pizza for lunch. Students are not yet mature enough to make the best decisions about their schooling, naturally putting adult school community

members at the decision-making helm. This maintains the Discourse of student-centeredness and explains why they are represented but not quite in power.

Discourse of accountability.

“Where things are now? Yes, the student data is in the center. Um the student data is connected. The teachers are directly connected. The student is definitely connected. And I know you didn't ask for student data, but I feel like some type of student data is here to focus more than who is a student.” – Janice

Part of this contradiction could also be due in part to conflation. Conflation is the merging of two or more sets of information, contexts, or ideas into one (“Conflation”, n.d.). In this case, students and their data are being considered as one entity. Unlike the students themselves, student data is paramount to accountability and determining a school’s efficacy. The lowercase discourse could be revealing that instead of a Discourse of student-centeredness, there is in reality a *Discourse of accountability* where the student data is at the center of everything schools do rather than the students themselves. Student data refers to end of grade test scores, benchmark results, and other standardized forms of student assessment used to make decisions about schools. As discussed in the introduction, current accountability Discourse places importance on the achievement and proficiency scores of students. According to the Discourse of accountability, these scores can be used to show how well a school is meeting the needs of students and whether or not certain schools can manage themselves without the intervention of outside governance. How much agency a school and its staff are given is reliant on proficient student data. This data is frequently used to make judgements about schools and the types of problem solving that need to be engaged. One participant related it was not until they had improved their student achievement data that the district had finally given them more power over

their own school wide practices. The problem is students are being conflated with their data when discussed in terms of this Discourse of accountability. Instead of looking at them as living, breathing beings with physical, social, and emotional needs, they are reduced to a set of numerical scores.

Whether it is the Discourse of student-centeredness or accountability, neither really reflects that students are people with inherent power. They are either being spoken for or conflated with scores. It is important to look at the discourse to see where students are being tokenized and silenced. Students offer tremendous insight to any community school implementation. Although extending recess was frequently mentioned in the ANA data, students also brought to light repairs that were needed in the student bathrooms and school wide issues around bullying. According to the actual discourse related to students, they are one of the most impacted groups in the school community wielding the least amount of power. I would argue that if school community members want to continue to feel they are doing what's best for their students, they need to uplift students to achieve true shared power and democratic decision-making. While this may require some consideration about what is most developmentally appropriate at the elementary, middle, and high school level, schools should have the expertise to differentiate leadership and power building skills. Speaking for students or conflating them with their data might seem like a much less complicated option. However, in the long run, it only adds to their powerlessness, a powerlessness that could eventually lead to the Discourse of powerlessness so many have normalized.

Discourse of white supremacy, structural racism, and hegemony.

“I just drew all of these arrows of parents, and I’m realizing that different parents have different levels of power.” – Penny

Race and class also remained a consistent determinant impacting who had power. Participants' discourse showed how race and class have greatly influenced who has power, especially when it comes to parent voice and teacher representation. This reinforces larger Discourses involving white supremacy, structural racism, and hegemony as discussed in the first chapter. White supremacy is the notion that White, middle class culture has been normed in our society (Mills, 1997). Structural racism is the embedded, inequitable systems that keep the White way the right way (Friedman, 1969). Any culture or group outside of these norms is expected to take actions to integrate themselves and make changes in order to better assimilate. This tendency to assimilate rather than critique has led to the current hegemony (DiAngelo, 2011).

White parents have traditionally wielded more power than any other parent group in schools, and public schools have struggled to equitably represent family demographics with school staff. Findings supported that this is still largely the case at both community schools. Latinx families were particularly powerless when language injustices were taken into account. Although funding has frequently been cited as the reason for this lack of communication resources, it also points out that the Discourse of white supremacy, structural racism, and hegemony are still alive and well. Despite a growing awareness and efforts taken at both Pointe and Harrison around race and class, this Discourse proved to be an ongoing challenge. One of the community schools had undergone a school wide vote to integrate a more positive behavior system. ANA data revealed a need to address lingering inequities involving suspension and behavior referral rates for Black boys. Conversations addressing race had become rather emotional and heated at the other school during a SIT meeting. Some parents and staff felt that students of color were being discussed using mostly *deficit thinking*. Deficit thinking is thinking that supports negative, stereotypic, or counterproductive ideas about students that can lead to one

lowering their expectations for those students (Ford & Grantham, 2003). When Black and Brown students' under achievement is normalized, accepted, or expected, deficit thinking is at play. Despite the fact that close to half of the student population and their families at both schools identified as English as a second language, prioritizing funding for much needed interpreters and translators at the school level continued to be a real issue for school wide communication. Between disproportionate punishment rates according to race, lowered expectations for students of color, and lack of language resources, the Discourse of white supremacy, structural racism, and hegemony persisted.

Finding evidence of this Discourse in the interview data was not particularly surprising. These narratives have persisted for over 500 years, and are ever present in the current historical context (Herbes-Sommers, 2003). Schools have much work to do to shift this Discourse and create opportunities for empowerment in the school community. Community schools themselves are a part of an ongoing attempt to counter this Discourse. What's particularly troubling about this Discourse, is how it completely silences and removes over half of the public school families from fully participating at their schools. Participants at both schools talked about the ways they had to pull Spanish speaking staff members from their expected duties to compensate for this lack of resources. Spanish speaking parents related instances where they sat through English only meetings virtually unaware of what was being discussed in order to make their presence known. Black parents had written a letter to teachers at one school pleading with them to maintain high expectations for their children despite the color of their skin. They had even set up specialized parent groups outside of the PTA that met to address the needs of their Black and Brown children in a system that continued to reinforce stereotypes and white supremacy. Parents at both schools related stories of inequitable treatment for Black and Latinx families. And while both of

the newly implemented community school models were actively working to address issues surrounding race and class, participants made it clear that the Discourse of white supremacy, structural racism, and hegemony continued to impact the power and representation of any group outside of the White, middle class (DiAngelo, 2011).

Discourse of engagement.

“We have to get on the same page with each other. And that’s mostly what we do as a community school is we pull together the workers and we say what is a proposal that enough of us can agree on? And then we take it to admin and we say we’re not asking you to solve problems between us, which is mostly what management gets asked to do right? Workers complain about each other to the boss, which undermines worker power and agency and it’s also a pain in the ass for the boss. So what we’re working on doing is creating a culture where groups of people who are on the ground create proposals to solve the problems that they’re struggling with and bring them to management to admin and say sign this.” – Ellie

School community member engagement is frequently cited as an important aspect of a healthy school (CCS, 2020; CPD, 2016). Whether or not that school is considered a community school or is attempting to establish more democratic decision-making opportunities, there exists a Discourse of engagement that says it is important to involve the school community in some capacity. Much like the Discourse of student centeredness, it is widely believed that engaging school community members will improve how that school functions. Although how that is carried out or what those specific benefits entail, the Discourse of engagement is clear that bringing in the local community and involving school staff stands to improve the school’s inner workings. Findings showed that parents and those in the underrepresented category were not as actively engaged as other groups despite the community school efforts. Assistant principals also appeared to be less engaged when comparing their involvement before and after the community

school implementation. Participants' discourses did not appear to support how the Discourse of engagement was being carried out at the community schools. Instead, they described how the school was not fully involving these school community members in the community school implementation process. Their lack of involvement also impacted how much influence they had over school wide decision-making, limiting their power in the overall hierarchy. Those with newly gained decision-making power appeared to accept this arrangement.

Parent engagement.

There was no clear agreement on where parents landed in the power hierarchy. According to the elicitation drawings parents, parents were cited in both the building level decision-makers and the underrepresented. The school staff that I interviewed mostly talked about power inside the school building through the many leadership teams created to better share and distribute decision-making power. While parents were clearly a part of the asset and needs assessments schools had conducted the previous school year, parents were not as involved with goal or instructional leadership teams. Parents had been invited to join SIT meetings to be a part of discussions and votes. However, these meetings frequently occurred during the school day at times when most parents were at work. During the interviews, parents seemed hesitant to participate in the schools' PTAs. These tended to be described as mostly White spaces that seemed disorganized, and as one parent put it, anxiety-provoking. Parents did not experience these same apprehensions when talking about SIT meetings and other school run assemblies.

Most of the parents I interviewed saw the shifts in power that were happening at the schools, but they mostly referred to increased teacher representation and not parent representation. One parent did say that she felt welcomed in school team spaces. However, a deeper look at her overall discourse revealed that she still felt like an outlier. Several parents

lamented their lack of knowledge about school decision making as they attempted to complete their elicitation drawings. One parent even stated that much less had shifted in the current power structures now that she had drawn it out. Other parents had similar sentiments to share. It was clear that parents felt welcomed at their schools, and tended to prefer school staff facilitated meetings over those lead by other parents. Despite this, findings showed that the 75% parent participation experienced during the ANAs had dwindled as the community schools continued with the implementation of decision-making teams. This could account for the lack of consistency in participant's depictions of where parents belonged in the schools' power flows. While parents—especially White parents—continued to have the power to influence school level decisions, their lack of proximity inside the school did impact how much power they were eventually able to hold.

Findings showed that the majority the school staff were comfortable with this level of parent engagement. Countering the Discourse of engagement, there were very few mentions about the lack of parent engagement on decision-making teams. Most did not even note their absence unless I specifically asked about whether or not there was a substantial parent presence in these spaces. One parent's discourse revealed that the school staff was split down the middle about encouraging more parent involvement, especially when it came to opening up their classrooms to parents. Despite a widely held notion that schools that involve parents tend to be better schools (CCS, 2020), teachers and staff appeared to be comfortable with the current shifts in the power hierarchy. Major shifts in schools' systems and structures can be jolting. Perhaps school staff felt comfortable representing parents' needs in these spaces as many adjusted to their newly held leadership positions and decision-making responsibilities. Too much change or involvement all at once could be more or less chaotic at a time when burgeoning changes were

taking hold. Before fully involving parents and other school community members outside of the building, these schools may have felt they needed to first adjust and create stability in the moment. Perhaps school staff feel more inclined to serve parents than include them for fear of loss of power. Further study in this area could prove to be interesting as the community schools continue to grow and mature.

Engaging the underrepresented.

This lack of proximity has been equally detrimental to those in the underrepresented group. Custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria staff typically work shifts before and after the regular school day. School nurses are only at the schools once a week. Asking these community school members to make time to participate in SIT meetings outside of their daily work schedules could put undue stress and responsibility on these staff, and be physically impossible for those working at more than one school. What's more, some of these school workers are no longer employed by the district, and are expected to report to the private companies that staff these school positions. Others are asked to report to specific departments within the county for administration and direction. While the principal is connected to these school community members, principals lack the authority to require participation even if efforts were made to better include them in school wide decision-making processes. Not surprisingly, these are also some of the least paid school staff working in the building. Requiring them to take on added burdens--such as returning to school hours before or after their shifts--would be fiscally inequitable. For all of these reasons and possibly more, these school community members remain the least represented, and therefore the least powerful in the school's hierarchies.

Participant discourses did lament their lack of participation in these decision-making spaces, but for many of the reasons listed above, seemed perplexed how to better engage them.

Their interviews appeared to support the Discourse of engagement, and unlike discourses involving parents, most mentioned how critical these school community members were in the everyday functioning of their schools. It seemed only natural that they be included in decision-making spaces. However, empowering these school community members was a perplexing feat to say the least. Participants were very clear about where this group stood in the power hierarchy, but they were at a loss as to how to better engage and empower those in the underrepresented category.

Re-engaging assistant principals.

Assistant principals do not readily come to mind when considering the Discourse of engagement. As a traditionally integral player in building level decision-making, it is almost assumed that they are engaged at some level. However, participant discourses revealed that their assistant principal was not as engaged, and many seemed comfortable with that arrangement. Whether countering the larger Discourse or opening it up to reconsider those assumed to be already engaged, their discourses pointed to a contradiction or disruption of sorts.

Participants ranked assistant principals immediately after principals in all of the elicitation drawings, implying a close connection between school level administrators. The principals I interviewed also talked about the team they shared with their assistant principals. Interestingly enough, neither the CSOs or principals I gathered potential participant lists from suggested I interview the assistant principal at their school. When participants made mention of their assistant principal, most of the discourse revealed a resistance to the community school model. One assistant principal was critical of how the community school model that was currently being implemented matched what was originally promised. The other assistant

principal presented to many of the participants as an agent actively working against the sharing of power.

The Discourse of engagement assumes that bringing in outside school community members has a positive effect on schools. However, interview discourses revealed that outside engagement had disengaged the schools' assistant principals in some capacity. Since the community school implementation, both schools had seen a shift in power from school administration to the SIT, goal, and instructional leadership teams. New teacher leaders had cropped up as a result, and decision-making was described as a shared process. Prior to the implementation both assistant principals had shared an intimate leadership bond with their principals that was now being infiltrated and dispersed across other school staff. Assistant principals had been one the first the principals consulted when making major school wide decisions in the past. Perhaps this re-distribution of power was uniquely felt by the assistant principals as a loss of power or degrading of rank. Once the principal's initial counsel, the assistant principals suddenly felt shut out and disempowered. Assistant principals rely on a closely-knit bond with their principal mentors. It is an essential component of their training and preparation towards becoming a school leader. Could it be that the community school implementation had encroached on this process and incited some resistance? Instead of feeling more included and represented as was the case with some of the other school community members, they were experiencing a loss in power and feelings of powerlessness amidst this reimagining of decision-making and engagement of others.

Shifts in power.

"I'd say the most kind of obvious culture change is seen at our staff meetings. Um, the year before, most of our meetings, were our principals standing up in front of the room telling us

what's going on telling us what's expected. And then we left and now we have representatives from committees standing up and sharing about their committees and then the goal team leads standing up and sharing about their committees and our principal just can kind of sit back and watch all of the different leaders around the school.” - Katie

Power is everywhere (Foucault, 1980), and yet the ordinary, grassroots people I talked with during this study noted moments of empowerment speckled throughout a generally top-down, hierarchical educational leadership system. School boards still had more power than principals, and students—despite their integral nature to schooling itself—were at the very bottom with virtually no say in how their schools were run. With powerlessness normalized and internalized, it is no wonder that shifting power has been so difficult. Even with all of the intentional efforts that went into the community school implementation, shifts were slow coming and affecting mostly teacher power. However, it is crucial that one recognizes this shift and the potential it holds for schools and their communities. Without the community school effort, none of the deep dives, rethinking, and systems change would have happened. Principals and assistant principals would still be wielding most of the building level power. Teachers would be handed instructions without representation, and SIT meetings would continue to be cut and paste operations more centered on getting it over with than making thoughtful school wide improvements.

Findings from this study also showed the importance of how school community members talk about power and who has it. These discourses are an integral part of recognizing one's power in order to make meaningful changes that could result in shifts in power. Discourse is important for educators and researchers to better understand current systems and structures (Lewis, 2006; Rogers et al, 2005; Fairclough, 2001). Just as the discourses from the ANA revealed what school community members thought about their schools, discourses are the first

step towards shifting power (Van Dijk, 2007). In addition, findings showed how these discourses shape organizing campaigns, strategies, and direct actions that could lead to further power shifts. It is not enough to know about power, one has to take purposeful action in order to shift power that is currently being housed in mostly grass-tops spaces. Organizing has the potential to reacquaint building level decision makers and underrepresented groups with their power, and create opportunities for those groups to engage in decision-making practices.

The importance of “discourse”.

An ongoing discourse about power can potentially make space for these much-needed power shifts (Van Dijk, 2007; Fairclough, 2001). Smaller discourses about how decisions were being made and further changes about those processes were the means by which both schools began to reimagine how power could be shared and shifted. Discourse during SIT meetings and goal teams was the mechanism by which school community members related to their power and represented their needs. Discourse between CSOs, principals, and other school staff throughout the implementation process opened up safe spaces where they could reimagine how their school made vital choices and think through tough moments when shared power seemed unattainable and messy. Talking about power opens one’s eyes to see that it is everywhere and inherently part of everything. It makes it something everyone can relate to and inform, and counters the Discourse of powerlessness and the normalcy of top-down decision-making. Having discourse around power whether it be in abstract, bigger picture ways or in more concrete, tangible ways is a vital component to making lasting, ongoing, and sustainable changes in schools that are representative of those school communities.

Critically looking at participants’ discourse on power, also deepens one’s understanding of Foucault’s (1980) notion that power is everywhere. Power has the potential to be everywhere,

but that is not necessarily always the case. Power behaves more like a moving particle. It is everywhere when it is flowing, unchecked in back-and-forth ways. When unrestricted and allowed to behave naturally, power is like a photon or electron bouncing around from place to place according to the context in which it is situated and who is related to it in that context. Sometimes it is at the top, sometimes it is at the bottom, and sometimes it is somewhere in-between. This makes where you are in the hierarchy much less relevant when power is allowed to take on this particle-like state. There are no inherently deserved or undeserved groups in this hierarchy, nor is there an absolute place where power is wielded best. Allowing power to move naturally according to the needs of that context has to the potential to change how groups are valued and included. However, power can potentially become stuck when those that are wielding it in a particular place and time decide to hoard it or restrict it in such a way that it cannot continue to flow as it would given no restraints. There is a fear that sharing power means that one is giving away their power rather than allowing power to move in ways that benefit the many instead of a few. Maintained Discourses are difficult to unseat, and in some ways provide people with the comfort of knowing what is supposed to happen (Van Dijk, 2007). However, thinking about power in this way is a zero-sum game where there is always inevitable loss rather than widely shared gain. Blockages have the potential for stagnation and conflict. They uphold worn out, inequitable Discourses that benefit the few. All of this can be avoided when power is allowed to move from context to context, place to place, and group to group. Critical discourse encourages this movement (Fairclough, 2001).

Organizing really works.

Critical discourse in and of itself can only be so impactful without an organizing strategy and plan of action. “Organizing is all about the systematic application of method and a deep

understanding of social networks” (McAlevey & Ostertag, 2012, p. 41). Without organizing and the thinking that goes into strategic political maneuvering in schools, it is possible that community schools would not have come to this district in North Carolina in the first place. Those honest conversations that went into questioning and changing how things were being decided and run at the school level would have never occurred. Targeted efforts would not have been made to inform and push school board members and county commissioners to consider community school models, and better yet, put forth the initial funding needed to make them a reality. Without organizing, there would not have been a space to uncover how deeply disempowered so many school community members continue to be and the fact that more work needs to be done to address the continual top-down format used for school decision-making. It was also organizing ideals that were the impetus for the union led community school training sessions that set the implementation in motion and provided the first union grant funded CSO position.

Organizing made these initial shifts in power manifest, and organizing will be the essential ingredient to making future shifts possible. The community schools have created spaces where teachers, parents, and school staff can engage in decision-making processes around their school. However, none of this would have been possible had the school board, county commissioners, and superintendent not all been willing to give the chosen public schools permission to make that happen. As many of the participants noted, these newly attained freedoms are still shaky at best, and could very easily be taken away without continued and focused organizing efforts. The leadership building and team decision-making efforts that are democratizing decision-making practices at the community schools could offer examples and ways other schools could share their decision-making power with the school community at large.

However, future community schools are far from trying, testing, and solidifying these practices in any substantial way without the power and autonomy to initiate these changes for themselves. Until that time, organizing continues to be a paramount strategy for making community schools happen in other districts and creating opportunities for further shifts in power.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings and the interpretations of those findings, I was able to derive the following conclusions and recommendations. These are in no way exhaustive, but they are a critical representation of the discourses the interviews and elicitation drawings afforded me. Implementing a community school model has been transformative at both schools, and as an ongoing process, these findings from the beginning stages of this transformation offer crucial information about the ways community schools impact power inside the school community. While this study may not be generalizable to public schools in general, it still offers a glimpse into the inner working of this implementation process, a glimpse that could prove useful and informative for other schools in similarly situated contexts. Current community school models also stand to potentially benefit from these conclusions and recommendations. Derived from the school community itself, they reflect their thoughts on power, who has it, and how it has shifted thus far.

Community schools have the potential to manifest power in spaces that are more representative of the school community (CCS, 2020). They have the potential to shape and shift widely held Discourses that may or may not equitably serve those school communities. In order to continue this momentum, I recommend that community schools of present and future continue the discourse, make better distinctions between students and their data, and create parent liaison positions to aid with *language justice*. Language justice is about “recognizing the social and political dimensions of language and language access, while working to dismantle language barriers, equalize power dynamics, and build strong communities for social and racial justice”

(CCHE Language Justice Toolkit, 2012, p. 2). Creating intentions around language justice helps to ensure that non-English speaking school community members have a chance to participate and build relationships with their power. In addition, community schools should look at ways to better engage parents, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, instructional assistants, and other classified staff to draw upon the expertise and knowledge these people bring into their school spaces. Finally, I urge districts and governance groups to consider the sustainability of their community schools and the actions they can take to ensure these schools have the time, funding, and power to make lasting, measurable changes. Figure 8 is an infographic of these seven conclusions and recommendations.

Continue the Discourse

One of the main takeaways from this study is how important it is to continue the discourse. CDA tells us that embedded in any discourse are underlying sentiments that speak to the pervasiveness of power and how it impacts everything and everyone (Van Dijk, 2007; Lewis, 2006). It is not enough to just make changes in schools if it is not done alongside an ongoing discussion with the people most impacted by those changes. As evidenced in the findings, discussions about power are necessary, especially considering how easily larger Discourses involving powerlessness and racism can persist (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 1999). Engaging school community members in discourse is an essential component of community schools (CCS, 2020; CPD, 2016). These discourses created the data for the asset and needs assessment that informed goal teams and changes in decision-making structures. Discourses allow for a better understanding of how school community members perceive of their realities and the assumptions on to which they hold.

Community school information sessions.

One way community schools can start to think about ways to continue the discourse is through ongoing community school information sessions. Qualitative research is not wholly dependent on frequencies, and many times poignant findings are in the minority (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). One interviewee—someone that has frequent contact with other school staff-- talked in depth about the lack of understanding about community schools despite the implementation that was underway. While it was not a frequent finding, what she disclosed seemed poignant considering its impact on future school community member buy-in. She pointed out that teachers and staff that had been recently hired had not had the opportunity to learn about community schools with the same intensity as the others that were present since the beginnings of the process. New families were also joining the school with each new school year that needed to have a solid understanding about what it meant to be a community school.

Community schools would be well served to create learning sessions for new comers that give them background on the philosophies surrounding community schools, the history of its multiple iterations, information about the latest asset and needs assessment data, and ways they can participate in their local school community. Having worked at an International Baccalaureate school as a classroom teacher, I was able to participate in a cohort my first year that acquainted me with the tenets of the IB. Creating something similar at current and future community schools would be a good way to keep the school community informed and involved. Having new staff and families learn about them on their own or by piecing it together from current activities runs the risk of alienating newcomers and possibly inadvertently creating a school environment that is harnessing the power of a few rather than the many. If community schools want to continue folding in parents, community partners, and staff, they need a mechanism that can “catch up”

incoming members so that they can participate in decision-making practices, school wide discussions, and voting processes. Otherwise, the schools run the risk of solely relying on those in the know and decreasing chances for representation. This ongoing learning cohort model not only continues the discourse and informs incoming staff and families, but it also could be used as a professional development model for restorative behavior practices, academic curriculum, and school wide practice.

One-on-ones.

Another way for community schools to continue the discourse is through an organizing technique called one-on-ones. One-on-ones are typically conversations held between workers and organizers where the two discuss pertinent issues involving working conditions to uncover what workers are most passionate about. There is usually an ask made of the worker at the end of the discussion to commit to some piece of work towards making changes to those working conditions (McAlevey & Ostertag, 2012). In this case, school community members could use one-on-ones to discuss relevant community school issues and concerns in order to make better plans of action about those issues and concerns. CSOs and other leaders could get a chance to understand the strengths and needs of other school community members, and make targeted asks regarding organizing strategies and plans of action. With so many barriers preventing underrepresented groups from participating in power building spaces and teams, one-on-ones could be a way to collect those voices and present them during decision-making processes. If parents or bus drivers cannot be present at SIT meetings, team leads could take the time to talk with these people one-on-one to find out their thoughts on the issues. Having conversations with these left out groups would not only inform them of school wide initiatives, but it could also help them start to build rapport with other school community members that bring them in relation to

their power. While this might not be a wholesale solution to better engaging the underrepresented, it could be the first step towards establishing and reinforcing the importance of their voices.

Let's talk about race and class.

One story that really stood out from the interviews involved a heated discussion that was had during a school improvement team meeting. It entailed a few teachers innocently talking about students in ways that some felt was deficit in nature, and ended in a Latinx parent and staff member speaking out. They felt especially slighted hearing other school community members talking about students in ways that downplayed their abilities and accomplishments. Although that was never the intention of those teachers in question, it pointed to a need for ongoing talk around race and class. As I tried to point out in my introduction, race and class continue to impact how schools uphold structural racism and white supremacy (Friedman, 1969; Mills, 1997). If there is not discourse happening around these pressing issues, they run the risk of reinforcing Discourses that perpetuate hegemonies that leave out over half of the school community. With so many forces actively perpetuating racism, community schools need to create spaces where just the opposite is being perpetuated. Opening up SIT meetings and decision-making say to families is just one step to equitably representing the school community. Ongoing discourse is also an important factor for equity as it gives schools the spaces to practice discourse about Discourses so insidiously embedded. It brings these issues to the surface and challenges their normalcy. As was related in the instance above, these are not easy conversations, and some school community members feel issues around race and class more or less acutely depending on their context. These conversations need to be accessible to all families, including those whose first language is not English. I will talk about this in more detail in the parent liaison

section below. Either way, ongoing discourse needs to be practiced time and time again in order for school community members to better understand their place in the struggle against structural racism, white supremacy, and the current hegemony. Discourse allows school community members to learn from one another how they can actively fight it together.

Students Versus Student Data

The issue of conflation between students and their data has the propensity of adding to their powerlessness. Schools constantly talk about how they are built around the needs of their students, but frequently are referring to their scores rather than their persons. Students have very little power in schools. However, student data has a huge influence on grass-tops decision-making (Labaree, 2012; Apple, 2004). Students and student data need to be considered as separate entities, and community schools would do well to continue to have discourse that treats them as such. In addition, students need to continue to participate in asset and needs assessments just as other stakeholders are. The information they share needs to be taken seriously and considered just as important as that of their parents. With so much emphasis in education being centered on student engagement, listening to their needs and opinions seems critical for understanding what works best in students' eyes. Students need to participate in decision-making processes on a level that school community members deem developmentally appropriate. Educators are well versed in differentiating and scaffolding instruction for their students on a daily basis. These skills can also be readily applied to thinking through ways in which students can represent themselves and add to the discussions that influence school wide policies and procedures. Further, moments of conflation need to be addressed and corrected in community school spaces. One can begin to shift the narrative by facing it honestly as it presents itself in

meetings, discussions, and votes that verbally shape students' primary learning environments (Gee, 1999).

Parent Liaison

In a critical discourse analysis guided study, I would be remiss not to emphasize the importance of language justice. Everything I have mentioned thus far about the importance of ongoing discourse would be for naught if some of the school community members were not able to access that discourse due to language barriers (CCHE, 2012). With close to half of the district's demographic population—that is also reflective of the community schools' family demographics—identifying as English as a second language, it is very important that measures continue to be taken to make meetings, discussions, votes, school wide events, and the like accessible to these families. As Latinx families continue to enter public schools and increase their numbers at rising rates, districts need to commit to making efforts to translate and interpret the goings on at their community schools (NCES, 2019). Latinx families cannot be represented if they cannot participate in the discourse. While the district does have translation and interpreting services available through central services, its ability to address all of the schools' language needs simultaneously is limited. Funding needs to be appropriated for the personnel and devices that make what is happening at their community school readily available to Spanish speaking families. Without active participation, these families cannot develop the relationships that connect them to their power. Without that power, the district risks alienating these voices and once again reinforcing Discourses that shut them out. Their voice and their power are needed to make a truly inclusive and equitable community school.

Parent Engagement

As the findings showed, there was not a consensus amongst the participants exactly where parents fell in the power hierarchy of the schools. Some felt they were part of the building level decision-makers, while others identified them as underrepresented. The parents I interviewed discussed being a more of a part of the asset and needs assessments, and less involved with SIT, goal, and instructional leadership teams. While they were involved with PTA, participants talked about that team being primarily responsible for school wide events rather than making crucial decisions about the inner workings of their community school. Decision-making teams usually met during school hours, limiting which parents were able to attend. Language barriers had also prevented full participation in these meetings. When parents were asked to draw power hierarchies, they expressed distress over how little they really understood about how power flowed in their school community.

This lack of relationship and parent engagement have pushed parents outside of the school wide decision-making bodies. They are not particularly connected. Much like students, they are all at once a crucial part of the school community and yet outside of that school community in terms of how much say they have in decision-making. And while that may not be the case for all groups of parents, particularly White, more affluent parents that can make time to be on the school's campus during work times, that is still less than half of parents according to the parent demographic data. Perhaps that is inherent in their relationship to the school since they are not school staff. However, with the majority of teaching staff identifying as White, Black and Brown parent representation is a much-needed resource. Parents may not be experts in curriculum or pedagogy, but they are a critical component to students' achievement and success (Children's Aid Society, 2011). When one community school opened up a discussion and vote to

parents on proposed changes in school wide restorative behavior practices, it was met with approval.

Parents need to be included in the work and decision-making that happens at the building level, and it needs to be done on their time. It is not enough to ask them to participate in an ANA that gauges strengths and needs without also engaging them in the processes where solutions and programs are discussed to utilize and meet these strengths and needs. Community schools should use their personnel to gather information from parents on crucial decisions using their organizing skills. The same phone interviews, focus groups, one-on-ones, and other data collection tools used for the ANA could be applied when gathering information pertaining to changes in curriculum or instructional strategies. School leaders could “map the building” with their parent leaders as well to ensure that more Black and Brown parents are being meaningfully engaged. Creating a position solely used for talking to, engaging, and organizing parents would be an ideal way of capturing the resources all parents can bring to the decision-making table. Community schools should also look at ways to better use their PTAs to engage parents in more meaningful ways. Instead of focusing solely on fundraising and fun school events, PTAs could be coached to engage in work more aligned with school improvement and goal teams. It would take some time and effort to build those skills and find parent leaders. However, if it can be done with administrators, teachers, and other school staff, it is possible to do with parents as well.

Representing the Underrepresented

Like parents and students, custodians, cafeteria workers, secretaries, bus drivers, and other classified school staff need to be included and represented on school decision-making teams. As the findings showed, these school staff were identified as some of the least powerful groups in the school community. As providers of crucial services that keep public schools up and

running, they have unique perspectives about the inner workings of their schools that could prove useful when making decisions. A concerted effort needs to be made to include these perspectives. While their schedules are usually prohibitive of their attendance at SIT and goal team meetings, the same types of organizing efforts that would better include parents could also be used to ensure these underrepresented groups have a say in what happens at their community school. One-on-ones, as discussed earlier, could be yet another way their voices and perspectives are collected and used.

Including these underrepresented groups does not have to fall squarely on schools and districts. Perhaps this is a larger issue about workers and their right to engage in their children's schools. State legislatures, policy makers, and education committees could think through ways to offer protected times off just as they would for jurors. Civic engagement should not be solely based on availability. This tends to allow for less working-class involvement.

Assistant Principal

Assistant principals at both schools showed some resistance to the community school model. Since the community school implementation, assistant principals faced major changes in power and decision-making structures impacted how they have traditionally participated in decision-making processes. Having participated in primary leadership responsibilities alongside the principal, assistant principals could be uniquely impacted by the newly implemented shared power practices brought on by the community school model. What was once an exclusive position alongside the principal has become distributed and more democratized, leaving assistant principals feeling isolated, discarded, and left out. Without some focused organizing work and relationship building specifically with assistant principals, this feeling of being pushed out and silenced could be perpetuated. Special consideration might need to be given to assistant

principals in this process to rally their buy-in, ensure their understanding of the importance of shared decision-making, and better define their role in this shift. Perhaps some of the same efforts that are made to coach and mentor principals through this change need to be applied in kind to assistant principals. As the elicitation drawings showed, assistant principals hold an important place in the school power hierarchy. Their buy-in could be a crucial component for future community school implementation efforts. I would also recommend that further study be conducted specifically involving assistant principals focusing on how their roles are impacted by community school induced power shifts.

Sustainability

Even as participants expressed satisfaction with some of the ways the community school implementation had opened up more democratic spaces for joint discussion and decision-making, they simultaneously talked about how fragile this new set up actually was. Many did not think that the community schools effort—along with the sharing of power—would continue should the current principal leave their position. As community schools are still in the beginning stages nationwide, pilot sites should continue to look for administrators and districts that are willing to be open and adaptable. Grass-tops leaders have to give schools the responsibility to innovate and take the time needed to collect and analyze data from their asset and needs assessments. School boards and county commissions may have to provide sustained funding and give community schools more autonomy over school wide changes. This could also point to a need for some front end organizing directly with the people that hold influential top-down positions.

At the building level a lot about how effective community schools will be depends on how open and reflective the principal is to rethinking how the school is run. Principals may need extra time to make much needed shifts in power and leadership. This could require ongoing

coaching on how to share power, engage cynical staff, and restructure leadership teams and problem-solving processes. School wide decision-making teams will need to be considered and re-imagined. Administrators' roles will need to include more listening, empowering, and opportunities for modeling distributive leadership. So much about community school success rides on the flexibility of school boards, county commissions, superintendents, and school administrators.

Those conducting research and engaging in strategy around community schools will need to continue looking for innovative ways to prepare those in educational leadership to be open to giving schools more autonomy over their building level programming. Additional research is needed from those community schools that have persisted and proved sustainable. These schools could offer crucial information about sustainability over the long term. Education leadership preparation programs should consider ways they teach administrators distributive leadership, democratic decision-making, and cultivating leaders within the school. What's more, once schools implement the community school model, they will have to continue working on creating effective ways of maintaining and growing staff buy-in. Building level commitment and alignment to community schools' practices and tenets should be strong enough so that it does not matter who the principal is.



Figure 8. This shows the seven conclusions and recommendations from the study.

Conclusion

Making change in schools is an extremely complicated endeavor. Some would even argue that true change in schools is a rarity, if it even happens at all (Kliebard, 2004; Reese, 2011). One of the reasons for this lack of change is how school decisions are made. At present, power is temporarily manifested and held by a small group of grass-tops leaders that may or may not really know what each of their individual school communities needs (Foucault, 1990). Most of these power-holding institutional entities are outside governance structures. Some of their leaders have been elected and are connected to the schools and communities they purport to serve, while others could be using their position and power to forward goals that are not as aligned with their school communities.

However, even the best intentioned of these grass-tops leaders cannot possible represent everyone's interests. They are shaped by the context from which they come, and they are shaped by race and class. As this historical moment has shown, white supremacy and structural racism are still at play in most school decision making spaces (Mills, 1997; Friedman, 1969; Trujillo et al, 2014; Apple, 2004). It is going to take time and intentional efforts to combat these forces and bring traditionally unrepresented school community members in relation to their power (Trujillo et al, 2014). It becomes increasingly important to do so looking at the shifting demographics happening in public schools to date. The majority of those learning in public school are Black and Brown students (NCES, 2019). What's more, schools have lost many aspects of their instructional autonomy during this era of standards and accountability. This is even more so the case in those underachieving public schools that have majority Black and Brown student populations, leaving these school communities with even fewer pathways to their power.

Having worked and organized for public education for the past ten years—and with community schools specifically for the past four years—I believe that this model and set of strategies presents a much different way for making equitable changes in public schooling. Community schools are different because they have been visited and revisited for the past century (Rogers, 1998). They are a concept that educators return to with improvements and additions and an ideal for which they continue to strive. They offer something that has not quite been realized, but is still full of potential. As the historical record shows, community schools have had some major successes in the past (CPD, 2016; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). Even those that faded over time had strengths and lessons from which educators, reformists, and researchers can learn.

Another consideration is that community schools could offer a tangible and sustainable way to shift how power is distributed and used in schools (CPD, 2016; NEA, 2018; CCS, 2020). This is a power shift I and many others would argue is long overdue (Labaree, 2012; Apple, 2004). I used a Foucauldian approach as my theoretical frame. The main tenets of this Foucauldian-inspired approach were: 1) power is everywhere and flows in capillary like ways from people, groups, institutions, and the like; 2) because of this fluidity, everyone and everything is defined by power just as power is defined by everyone and everything; 3) because people and power are mutually constitutive, everyone has access to power through their relationships; 4) shifts and/or changes in power, how it behaves, and who has access to it can be made through these relationships; and 5) discourses could reveal these shifts and/or changes (Foucault, 1980, Foucault, 1990; Gee, 1999). Because of how they harness the potential power of a wide variety of school community members, community schools stand to be more representative of those working and learning in schools. They help those community members

create relationships their power by giving them opportunities to participate in decision-making spaces. They could even potentially create a balance of power between grass-tops and grassroots, and they are flexible enough to allow power to shift and flow according to what is needed from schools at that moment in time. They give grass-tops and grassroots alike a chance to construct and shape power flows inside schools. They offer a flexible structure that harnesses the funds of knowledge of their school communities in order to create more culturally sustaining—and potentially more academically proficient—learning environments (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005; CCS, 2020).

Using a qualitative case study model, I was able to interview 20 school community members from two community schools in an urban district in North Carolina. I used a critical discourse analysis methodology to see how these participants were talking about power, who has power, and how power had shifted thus far in the implementation process. CDA offered me a chance to analyze Discourses/discourses to better understand the systems and structures surrounding community schools and how power is distributed in these spaces (Gee, 1999; Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 2007).

As the findings showed, the school community members that participated in this study articulated changes in how school decision making was being better shared at two community schools in North Carolina. School community members that had once felt micro-managed were beginning to create relationships with their power. Decision-making structures that once served the top-down model were being reconfigured and re-imagined to become welcoming spaces open to democratic decision-making. While there is still more work to be done, these cases show that community schools have the potential to shift more power into the hands of grassroots school community members and redirect the current emphasis on standards and accountability. They

open up opportunities for schools to engage in local pedagogies that fit their needs by welcoming in those learning and working in schools and helping those underrepresented in schools chances to establish relationships with their power. They open up spaces for more human-centered schooling efforts that are guided and created by those most related and impacted. Community schools are a blended effort to use what we know about good schooling and organizing to make sustainable changes based on real data from parents, students, and school staff—data that highlights both the needs and assets of those communities.

From my findings, I was able to derive seven main conclusions/recommendations. I have recommended that community schools of present and future continue the discourse, make better distinctions between students and their data, and create parent liaison positions to aid with *language justice*. Community schools should also look at ways to better engage parents, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, instructional assistants, and other classified staff to draw upon the expertise and knowledge these people bring into their school spaces. They also need to be cognizant of how they are garnering the buy-in and protecting the decision-making power of assistant principals that may be inadvertently impacted by distributed leadership practices. Finally, I urge districts and outside governance to ensure these schools have the time, funding, and power to make substantial changes.

Limitations.

As with any study, there were some limitations to this qualitative case study that should be acknowledged. For one, not including a visual sticky note with the community school organizer position noted was an oversight on my part. CSOs were one of the least depicted positions in the elicitation drawings indicating that this omission did impact my visual data. While they were mentioned in every interview I conducted and analyzed as a part of my

discourse data, it is highly probable that their lack of inclusion in the elicitation drawings was due to this mistake.

Another limitation worth noting concerned the lack of documents in my data. I had originally intended to include school communications, invites, fliers, and any other informational materials pertaining to the community school implementation. Unfortunately, schools were in the process of going virtual prior to my data collection. This shift proved extremely taxing to all of those involved, and goal teams specifically related to community schools shifted focus to making virtual learning environments possible for their students. Document availability was limited, and I made an executive decision to refrain from making any further requests of those managing this shift in the community schools. Having this additional data source could have impacted my findings and conclusions.

Yet another limitation was that I did not interview either of the assistant principals at the community schools. They were not included in the participant lists I requested from CSOs and principals, and it was not until I started my interviews that I realized possible resistance to the community school implementation. Inclusion of their voices could have provided more clarity around how they are specifically impacted by shared and distributed power. To this end, I was also unable to interview any classified staff or students at either of the schools. Unlike the assistant principals, all of the participant lists included classified staff that were contacted to participate with no success. Students were involved in the asset and needs assessment conducted at each school prior to this study. However, their voices could have provided useful narratives, especially when considering ways to better involve them in the decision-making process.

Further, it should also be noted that the focus of this study was on the agreement participants reached during their discussions of power. There were some incongruencies that

were discussed in the interpretation of findings, particularly when it came to answering how participants talked about power and who had it. Because of the descriptive nature of the study, I tried to place more emphasis on the similarities across schools and the groups therein. Pulling out differences between schools and groups would have tended towards comparison and evaluation. An evaluative study could prove useful at a later time once the schools had completed their initial implementation process and transitioned back to in person learning. Given the stage at which both community schools were in their implementation, I decided to focus on what both were saying about power which could have downplayed the complications that naturally exist in school environments.

Final Thoughts

As I write this conclusion, I am awe struck by how far I have come. I am honored that I have finally completed a study around the community schools work I have been doing over the last six years. And while I fully realize that this iteration may fall away as many others have done in the past, it is still important to find ways to push back on the current notions of standards and accountability. It is equally important to upset current power manifestations and redistribute it amongst those doing the work and receiving instruction in schools. Students need to be given chances to become all that they can be, not just obedient workers. I believe that community schools can offer them that chance. One quote that frequently comes to mind, and something I think describes why schools need to build people and not workers is by W. E. B. Dubois from *The Talented Tenth* (1903). It reads:

Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of schools-- intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it--this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life.

On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man mistake the means of living for the object of life (p. 4).

I, too, hope to never mistake the means of living as the object of life, and I plan to work for human centered schools for the entirety of my academic career. Community schools are one way to make human centered schooling manifest through the ways they shape power and those who are related to their power. They have the potential to influence how people think and discuss power. They can actively shift who has power, and help school community members make those power shifts happen through strategic and purposeful means. I look forward to continuing my studies with community schools and documenting how they grow and change. I am eager to see what they will eventually do to make school experiences more about becoming an engaged community member whose human needs are met rather than about being obedient, socially efficient workers upholding a racist and classist system.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my work.

APPENDIX A

Email Recruitment

Hello _____,

My name is Jess Benton, and I am doing a dissertation research study about how school community members are talking about power. You are receiving this email because your principal/community school organizer, _____, suggested that I speak with you because of your participation in the community school implementation at your school. I am currently conducting interviews and would like to invite you to participate.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and will be confidential. Should you decide to participate, you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty at any time.

Your participation would include the following:

1. The interview will last approximately one hour and will take place at the location of your choosing within the county being studied. The researcher will ask you a series of interview questions and audio record the session.
2. After all of the interviews have been conducted and the transcripts have been developed, the researcher will ask you to confirm that the transcripts accurately reflect your comments. Your review of the transcripts will take approximately 30 minutes.
3. There may be a need to participate in a third interview should the analysis call for it. This could take up to one hour depending on what is needed.

Your participation would offer crucial information to understanding the community school implementation process at your school. If you are interested in being a part of this study, please respond to this correspondence by _____.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to ask. Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Jessica Benton (Primary Investigator)
jessb@live.unc.edu
904.472.7645

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol & Elicitation Activity

Interviewer: The purpose of this study is to understand how school community members discuss power, who has power, and how power has shifted since your school started the process of becoming a community school. When I say school community members, I am referring to parents, teachers, instructional assistants, administrators, and anyone else working in a school. I will not be talking to students at this time.

Before we begin the interview, I want to be clear about what I mean by power and have you do an activity involving what you think about who has power in your school.

So, a lot of time, people think of power as the law or government, like a place. Or they might think of power as a position like the principal or the president. The way I am talking about power, however, is more about relationships. Part of what my study is based on is how power is about being able to get your wants and needs known. About participating in decision-making processes such as the goal teams or school improvement team. It's about being able to actively work towards making changes that you want to see, especially in schools. It's my hunch that when school communities have more power or relationships with their power, they can make changes at their school that benefit them.

Your school recently became a community school and you did an asset and needs assessment. You're now making goal teams to work on what you found. I want to see if those involved think that power has shifted in any way or that they now have more power than they did before the community school model was implemented.

Does that make sense? Do you have any questions about any of that? *Answer questions as needed.*

So, the first thing we are going to do is something called an **elicitation device**. In a moment I am going to give you some index cards with titles on them (in person). OR I am going to share a link with you via email that will take you to a MURAL page with some stickies (virtually). I want you to show me what power looked like BEFORE you became a community school. Then I want you to show me what that has looked like AFTER becoming a community school. You will arrange the cards/stickies in any way you see fit. What I really want to see is how you would organize the titles. There are no right or wrong configurations, and I want you to think as creatively as you want. Do you have any questions about that?

Participants arrange the cards/stickies before and after. I will be recording what they say as they do the activity. I will also take pictures of the before and after results.

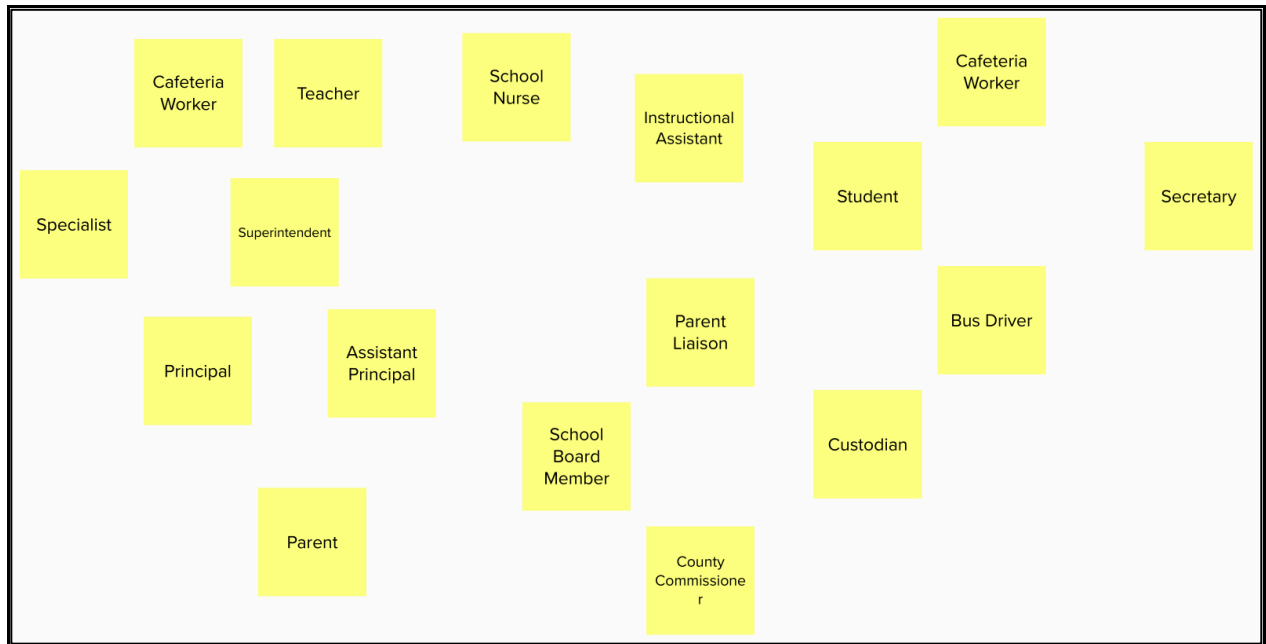
Thank you for that. Now, I would just like to ask you some questions about your experiences becoming a community school. The way I have structured the interview is by first asking questions about how you came to be a part of this community school process, then asking about your role, and finishing with some questions about what it has meant for you.

Please feel free to ask any clarifying questions as needed, and don't feel pressured to answer anything you aren't comfortable answering.

1. How did you come to be a part of this community school?
2. Tell me about your role at the community school. How would you describe your job here at _____ Elementary?
3. What has been your role in this community school implementation process?
4. What has your participation in this process meant for you/your child?
 - a. What has changed, if anything, about your experience at this school?
5. Tell me about the power structures at your school.
 - a. Have you seen any of those structures shift?
6. What does your community school need to continue working on?
7. Where do you see this community school initiative going in the future?
8. Anything else you think you'd like to add or that you think I need to know about the community school process here at your school.

Thank you so much for your input. I will be sending you a copy of a transcript of your interview for your check. I want to make sure I accurately capture what we have talked about today. Feel free to reach out with any questions in the meantime. Your input is greatly appreciated!

APPENDIX C



ENDNOTES

¹ A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the schools in this study

² In vivo is a coding procedure that uses participant's own wording for the creation of codes as described by Saldaña (2016). It is not to be confused with the Nvivo software program used for qualitative analysis.

³ A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the county where the study was conducted

⁴ A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the county where the newsletter was created

⁵ A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the county where the newsletter was created

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